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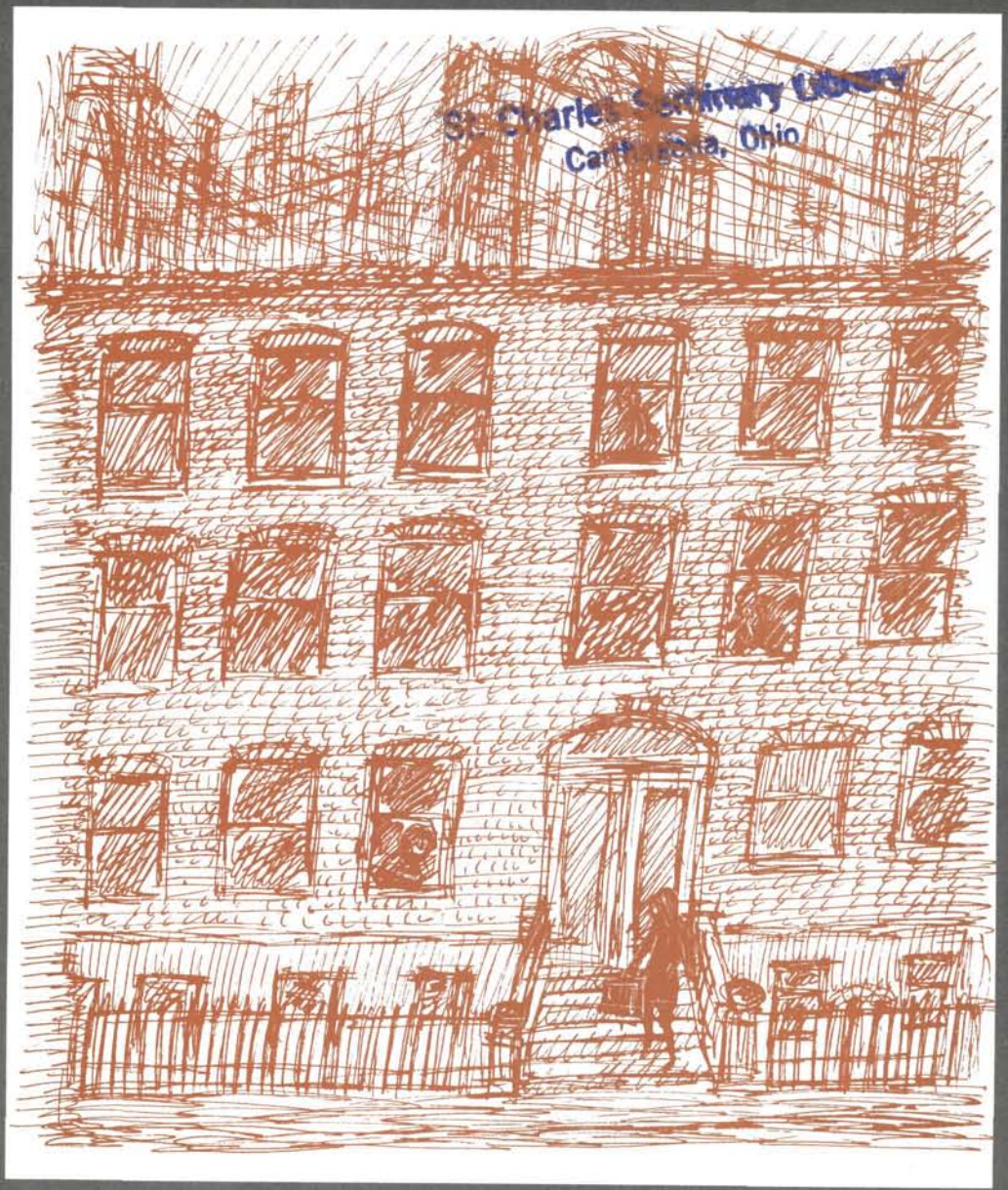

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To the Editors

Varieties of prejudice

My own experience lends support to Paul Baumann's effort to distinguish among the various forms of anti-Semitism [Correspondence, August 15].

When I was growing up in Chicago before World War II, I often had discussions about Jews with my father, who was born in Poland. For him, a Jew was not a Pole. They were separate ethnic categories. His occasional generalizations about Jews in Poland, with which I would disagree, were invariably about their commercial activities. Neither their religion nor his (he was a Catholic Christian) ever entered our conversations. The first time I learned about the term "Christ killers" was when, at the age of twenty-one, I read Michael Gold's book, *Jews Without Money*.

ED MARCINIAK
Chicago, Ill.

Down with the churchy

I was seriously considering canceling my subscription when your down-to-earth money letter arrived. Having once spent a brief stint inside the "Godbox," I could not help feeling sorry for you because you had to move uptown to such institutional surroundings. At least you can take walks along the river.

Anyway, here's a check to help keep your independent spirit alive. In case you want to know why I almost dropped out, I'm getting tired of Catholics kvetching about the problems with the "other team," be it the conservatives against the progressives or the Catholics vs. the Protestants or men against women. I want to know how are people of faith living their lives, not so much what are their favorite liturgical practices.

The gap between rich and poor continues to widen, in the world, in the city, in our hearts and minds. It is by far the greatest split we confront as a people of God. You do write about it sometimes and for that I'll continue paying your expensive subscription rates. But if the intramural squabbles of the Catholic church take over, I'm out of here.

Thanks for all you do right.

ANNE PILSBURY
Center Lovell, Maine

Website takes some hits

As a fairly long-term subscriber, I was pleasantly surprised to find that you have put up a very respectable web page. I was also pleased to see that you had received some 635 "hits" in the past few months. The engineer in me could not resist calculating that this represents some 1 percent of *Commonweal*'s readership base. This may mean that not only am I a fairly rare bird as a conventional subscriber, but that I am truly uncommon as one who both receives the magazine and also clicks on your web site.

On the other hand, maybe those 635 hits are nonsubscribers who may be contemplating a plunge into sustained readership. With the power of the Web expanding exponentially (sorry, can't help it), perhaps by the millennium, the *OCLC Online Union Catalog* will see you hitting Number 15, at least, and passing *Reader's Digest*. Watch out, *Time*!

TOM FISCHER
Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

From the editors: By way of explication, we'll mention that the *OCLC Catalog* is a database of bibliographic information. It lists about 25 million books and about a million and a half "serials"—magazines and the like. In its 1995 compilation of the 100 top serials (ranked by the number of libraries reporting holdings), *Time* was first, *Christianity Today* was 100th, *Reader's Digest* 16th, the *New York Times* 66th, and this very magazine that you are now holding was 71st (ahead of *Ms.*, the *Economist*, *Commentary*, *Vogue*, and *America*). But we do not expect to topple *Time*, on or off the Web, until the *fourth* millennium.

Frank made me do it

Frank McConnell should really not go around daring people to read 773-page books [*Mason & Dixon*, by Thomas Pynchon, review, August 15]. It tends to carve whole big chunks out of their schedules and to effect goodness knows what other changes in their psyches. Relying on Mr. McConnell's wonderfully flamboyant prose style, and encouraged in the adventure by our small local library's actually having two copies, I took out *M & D* and immersed myself in my first Thomas Pynchon. I am still breathless.

It may have taken Mr. McConnell until halfway through the book to get the overarching theme, but it took me easily that long simply to learn how to read it. It's like riding a wild horse along the edge of a deep but scenic canyon: You have to sit very loosely and watch everything very intently.

Alas, the experience intensified one of my prejudices about literature, to wit: Writing comes in four classes. Some almost anyone can read: Joseph C. Lincoln and John Greenleaf Whittier, for example. The next level is for

(Continued on page 4)

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COMMONWEAL

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reasonably educated folks, or people with strong imaginations. How about Jane Austen, T.S. Eliot, and the James Joyce of *Ulysses*? The third class can be understood and perhaps enjoyed only by other writers and English teachers. John Barth comes to mind, the aforementioned Mr. Pynchon, and maybe Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. The fourth category, included here only to make up a set, is occupied by foreign-language authors in the original and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

Mr. McConnell, be it noted, is both a writer and an English teacher.

None of the above explains why the next time he recommends a book, and as soon as I've finished *Vineland* (the only other Pynchon book available at our library), I will snatch it up humbly and with joy. (REV.) BILL MCLAUGHLIN
Hyde Park, Mass.

Enough already

The editorial tolerance that you displayed in printing Mary Beth Celio's letter in its entirety [Correspondence, September 2] should make you all candidates for beatification. I suspect that most *Commonweal* readers have had "a little grade-school math" and could have been spared at least two lengthy paragraphs. JAMES J. HIGGINS
Seattle, Wash.

Good news about Franz

It was heartening to read Gordon Zahn's report of progress toward the canonization of Franz Jäggerstätter, the Austrian martyr under the Nazis ["The Peasant Who Defied Hitler," September 12].

Coincidentally, I had been reading Kenneth Woodward's book *Making Saints*, which includes several references to the Jäggerstätter canonization, among them a comment that declaring him a saint "would be interpreted as official endorsement of pacifism—a position which conficts with the church's 'just-war' tradition and an attitude with which John Paul II has shown little sympathy."

JOSEPH QUINTON
Lake Worth, Fla.

Please bill me

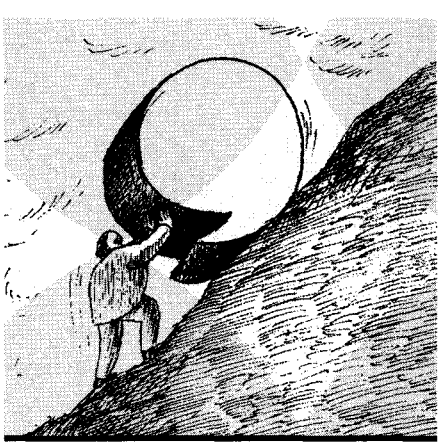
Almost never am I happy to pay bills; my yearly subscription payment for your magazine is the unique exception. At our Thanksgiving day dinner prayer, *Commonweal* is one of the blessings we mention for which we are truly grateful....I am always consoled and instructed by the consistently balanced approach your journal provides. *America* does the same.

FRANK C. ARRICALE
Bayside, N.Y.

What's in a phrase?

Near the middle of Eugene McCarraher's fascinating article ["Smile, When You Say 'Laity,'" September 12] lies a lament—one with which I do not concur—about the positioning of certain ideas within the professional-managerial class in America. After twelve years as a member of that class, I have been happy to see that recognition of personal worth and personal conscience (often known as diversity) has transformed life within my corporation. It is the nonmanagers who have brought about this transformation by using the words the managers first uttered.

The disparaged Total Quality Movement is not much more than a group discipline for success, a corporate child of the examination of conscience. It's a method for people to work together, comprehensible to all. And yes, it has an impact on the corporate bottom line.



As I read the article, I wondered whether some good ideas, loosely wrapped in language less precise and weighty than a Kantian argument, were being defamed because their cousin ideas were very poorly draped and mute, or because the ideas were uttered by the wrong people with the wrong jobs—corporate jobs.

Ideas usually gain territory in our thoughts and actions through a single phrase that has sticking power, much like the hummable parts of great music. Exemplary phrase: "Love one another as I have loved you." A phrase here, a phrase there, often contradictory phrases, stir our spirits and guide our lives. Cultures change, even corporations, if the phrase has power enough and the people repeat it loudly. Exemplary phrase: "Silence = Death." Would Mr. McCarraher call this cant, or phony? How grim.

I finished Mr. McCarraher's article wondering which phrases from Catholic tradition he would propose to balance out the whole, or should I just open my *Summa* and let it sing? Now there's a glittering consumerist fantasy. JOHN SHEKLETON
Minneapolis, Minn.

Editor's note: Additional comments on the McCarraher article will appear in a future issue.

Thanks all round

Just a short note to express my continuing appreciation for your efforts—especially for this new way [e-mail] to communicate with you and for your issue of September 12, which I have just read cover to cover. Let me note, in particular, Father John Garvey's moving meditation on suffering, the stimulating essay by Eugene McCarraher, and the probing interview of Archbishop Desmond Tutu by Frank

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The Middle East & us

The Mideast peace process is on the brink of failure. A predictable unpredictable leap could clear this hurdle—the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian effort at rapprochement, after all, is a story of near-failures. In September, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, during her first official visit to the Middle East, spoke candidly and directly to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat about the ways in which each was derailing the peace process and the steps each must take to reestablish confidence.

Are the Oslo Accords history anyway? Though never clear-cut as to means, Oslo seemed to promise a clear-cut end: A demilitarized Palestinian entity operating under its own government and its own laws on the West Bank, in Gaza, and in some portion of Jerusalem; and a secure Israel living in peace and prosperity with its Arab neighbors. The 1993 agreement signed by then-Prime Minister Yatzik Rabin and Yasir Arafat rested on the calculation that after decades of war, terrorism, and oppression, it was time to try peacemaking. The two worked at building trust and constructing a framework that would lead to a settlement. That trust is now gone, disrupted when Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli religious fanatic, and shamefully squandered by Arafat and Netanyahu since then.

Each man allowed the peace process to wither by useless posturing and counterproductive demands: Israel could not be secure as long as Islamic militants operated freely in Palestine; the Palestinian Authority would not act against the militants as long as a political settlement kept disappearing into an uncertain future. Though suicide bombers kill and wound scores of Israelis, Arafat still will not act. His rebuttal—that terrorism was not eliminated when Israel was responsible for security on the West Bank and in Gaza—does not excuse his own failures.

But Israel keeps suspected terrorists in administrative detention subject to court-sanctioned torture, closes its borders to Palestinian workers, continues to build provocative settlements, revokes the identity cards of Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, holds back tax monies owed the Palestinian Authority; all of these actions end in fostering conditions which are used to justify acts of terrorism. This is not the moral equivalent of suicide bombers, but it is fast becoming the moral equivalent of moral equivalence.

Arafat and Netanyahu are two of a kind: neither is a statesman; both are bully boys who have prevailed in tribal politics; each has played to the extremists and religious fanatics who never wanted a peace settlement in the first place.

Secretary Albright's blunt words to Arafat and Netanyahu and her strong departing message—call me when you're ready to negotiate—may be good diplomatic moves. But what of U.S. responsibility in allowing this war by other means to continue?

Prime Minister Netanyahu can do as he pleases because he knows that the Clinton administration, the U.S. Congress, a significant portion of the American-Jewish community, the Evangelical and Catholic communities, and American public opinion generally will not fail in their support for Israel. Knowledgeable observers in these sectors may or may not like Netanyahu's policies, but they are firm sup-

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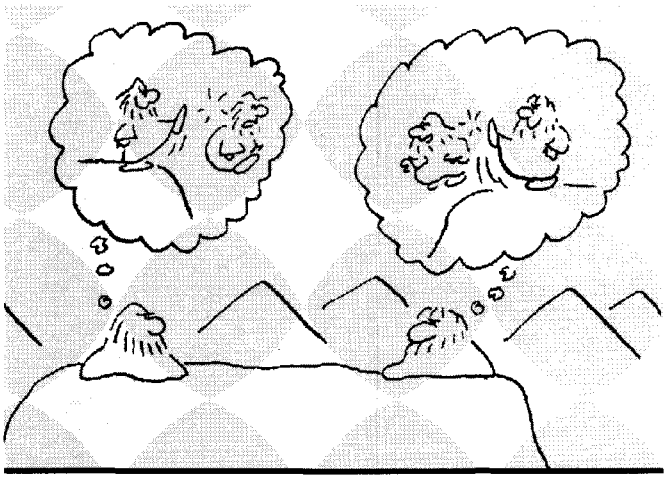

porters of Israel. It is difficult to separate that support from the man who is the elected leader of the country.

A group of American-Jewish leaders has tried to do that by urging Secretary Albright to act exactly as she did in September: Criticize Mr. Netanyahu's unilateral actions as well as Mr. Arafat's foot-dragging, urge a time out from actions that will provoke the other side, and accept mutual responsibility for negotiating a settlement (*Washington Post*, September 19, 1997).

What of the Catholic community? Memories of the Holocaust, decades of interfaith meetings, and close friendships tie the Catholic church and many Catholics to the Jewish community in the United States and in Israel. And so does fear—fear that criticism of Israeli policies will unleash charges of anti-Semitism. That fear, if it is realistic, is also counterproductive. For what Israel needs is not uncritical friends and unquestioning support, but a clear message: Mr. Netanyahu's policies are destroying the last best chance for a peace settlement, and no one who cares for the long-term future of Israel should support them.

Not only that. Some of these policies have their source and support in those Orthodox Jewish groups who for religious reasons promote a Greater Israel and who are working to secure their own religious control over all of Israel.

They ought to find themselves subject to the same criticism that Vice-President Al Gore made to Boris Yeltsin over legislation privileging Russian Orthodoxy. Or the same scrutiny that Evangelicals and the Christian Right have brought to persecution and discrimination against Christians around the world. What about discrimination against Conservative and Reformed Jews in Israel? Harassment of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank? The travel restrictions placed on Muslims trying to reach their sacred places? The unlikely event of these protests being made suggests how deeply implicated Americans are in the demise of the Oslo Peace Accords.

If the Mideast peace process goes over the brink, Palestinians and Israelis will pay an awful price. Those who are their friends should help them to calculate how very high that price will be.

EXTRA

TWO TROUBADOURS ■ Evidently the times they really are a changin'. Pope John Paul II, who surpasses even the Rolling Stones as a stadium draw, shared top billing last month with rock legend Bob Dylan at a concert in Bologna, Italy. Bob wore a white cowboy hat, John Paul wore...well, white. Some of John Paul's more fervent American admirers like to present him as a bulwark against a hedonistic Western culture spawned by excesses often associated with the 1960s. The raspy-voiced and irreverent Dylan, of course, is almost an icon of 1960s excess—and not a bad songwriter to boot. Seeing Dylan and John Paul together on stage could be said to have provoked a powerful sense of dissonance, but the two old pros carried it off without a hitch. John Paul acknowledged Dylan's eminence as a cultural force by turning the words of "Blowing in the Wind" to evangelical purposes. "How many roads must a man walk down before he becomes a man?" the pope asked. "I answer you: One! There is only one road for man and it is Christ, who said 'I am the life.'"

Dylan responded in kind by serenading the pope with "Knocking on Heaven's Door" and not "Lay Lady Lay" or "I Want You."

The lion, it is true, will lie down with the lamb. But who would have guessed that such a meeting would be amplified?

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JOHN GARVEY

JUDGMENT DAY

You wouldn't want to miss it

There have been suggestions that the problems of modern Christianity began when people stopped believing in hell. It could be placed at another level: people believe that hell may be possible for people like Hitler, but not for themselves, because God is surely too nice for that. The problem may be not that we have stopped believing in hell, but that we have stopped believing in judgment. Even if we do believe that we will be judged, we also believe that of course we will be forgiven, because God is too nice to do anything else.

The problem with this is that God's niceness is not to be found anywhere—certainly not in the Bible. God's love, certainly; God's glory, joy, anger, all sorts of things—but niceness? Some uncles are nice, and a few teachers, but not God. When Job questions him from the depths of his despair, God uses a form of sarcasm on a suffering man, and (this is the marvelous power of the book) it is a magnificent revelation of God's glory. But it isn't nice.

I bring this up because although God's love for us is frequently described as "unconditional"—meaning God will go on loving us no matter what—God's forgiveness is conditioned. The story of the unjust steward concludes, "In anger his Lord delivered him to the torturers [not "jailers," as some soft-hearted translators have rendered it], till he should pay all his debt. So my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (*see* Matthew 18: 21-35). After giving his disciples the prayer we call the "Lord's prayer," Jesus returns to one of its clauses: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses." And of course in Matthew 25 those who failed to help the suffering are condemned for having failed to help Christ himself, and they go away into eternal punishment.

We like to think that we have grown beyond such a grim, either/or-ish approach to religion, but we may instead be tone-deaf. Dostoevsky's understanding that the damned are in the presence of God, but their eternal suffering is their inability to love—to be in the presence of love, unable to love—seems absolutely persuasive to me. And it applies to forgiveness as well. We have a sentimental understanding of words like love and forgiveness. Love is romance, a strong feeling, being swept away by infatuation, hand-in-hand walks on the beach at sunset; but in Jesus we see love as something quite different. "Friday's Child," Auden's poem in memory of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, concludes

"... And if we obey all ten of them, he'll recognize our right to exist."

Now, did He really break the seal
And rise again? We dare not say;
But conscious unbelievers feel
Quite sure of Judgment Day.
Meanwhile, a silence on the cross,
As dead as we shall ever be,
Speaks of some total gain or loss,
And you and I are free
To guess from the insulted face
Just what appearances He saves
By suffering in a public place
A death reserved for slaves.

The Epistle to the Ephesians puts this model of crucified love before us as a model of the relationship between husband and wife, which is also the model of Christ's relationship to the church. Love is the willingness to die for the other.

When Christianity gets reduced to moral behavior it loses everything. Moral behavior is important—we have a right to expect it, not only from Christians—but what Christianity says is that we are to be toward one another the way God revealed himself to be toward us, in Christ. That means a lot more than morality, and forgiveness is not a moral act, in the usual sense of the word. We are to share the Divine Life completely—this is what Orthodoxy means by *theosis*, echoing Athanasius: "The Word became man so that men might become God." But we will be incapable of that sharing if we have not learned to love and forgive as we have been loved and as we have been forgiven.

To forgive the enemy, to love those who hate us, simply puts us in relation to one another the way God is in relation to us. It is radically difficult. As hard as it is to forgive a wrong done to oneself, it is much harder to forgive a wrong done to someone you love. But unless we learn to do this, we will be truly incapable of being forgiven—not because there is some tit-for-tat involved, but because we will not have learned something we need to know, will not have emptied the space needed for God to enter. We will not be able to be toward one another as God is toward us. To be able to be crucified means giving up everything, including all self-regard.

God has loved us, and does, and will;

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and God has forgiven us. But we will be incapable of receiving any of this without transformation. To know how to forgive is to know how profoundly in need of forgiveness we are. The Lord says "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11: 19). But this comes in the context of a call to repentance; it requires us to know that we have hearts of stone.

That discovery means being open to a kind of brokenness that we do not want to admit into our lives. But that brokenness is the beginning of what it means to see that unless we can truly take up the cross, the resurrection will also be closed to us. This is not because God does not want to forgive us, and judge us mercifully, but because God will not force us into the life that we were meant from the beginning of time to share freely.

In biblical terms, this all comes in the context of judgment. Judgment means that we may not be judged well—that's a risk we take. If anything has gone out of certain contemporary approaches to religion, it is this sense of risk, and I think it could be argued that it is essential. Jesus' being raised is not significant because it is unique; it is significant because he is the first fruits, the first to rise of many brothers and sisters. His Resurrection is the beginning of the resurrection which will include all of us, and we are raised in order to be judged. We are blessed because having seen the mercy of Jesus we know that the one who judges us will be merciful; but we must know that we will be judged, and our failure to forgive, and to care for others, is at the center of what the result of that judgment will be. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

IMMIGRANT NATION

A mixed history

In the coverage of the popular reaction to the death of Princess Diana an interesting observation was made more than once. The demonstration of grief in England seemed to come from a people very different from the stoic and doughty British of World War II days described so movingly in the recitation, *The White Cliffs of Dover*. And indeed the Britons we saw on television seemed a very different mix. Dark skins mingled with the fair; floral tributes were brought by those wearing dreadlocks as well as by fair-haired Saxons. Together they gave way to emotion and voiced their sorrow without shame. It seemed evident that the English people had been changed, at least in part, by immigration.

We, too, are being changed by immigration. As Glenn C. Loury notes in the *New Republic* (August 25), "It is no great secret, that thanks to the rapid growth of America's Latinos and Asian population, whites of European descent stand to become a minority in this country sometime in the next century." Many of us remember the comely brown-skinned woman on the cover of *Time* some time ago. She was projected, in an issue on immigration, as the typical American woman of the twenty-first century.

"Don't be so darn self-righteous—You used to be a Viking yourself."

The immigrants of the last quarter-century are merging quite successfully into our society. The rate of intermarriage is high. Loury also notes that over two-fifths of Hispanics and half of Asians in the twenty-five to thirty-four-years-old bracket had spouses from different ethnic or racial groups. (*See* Peter Feuerherd's "A New American Tribe," *Commonweal*, September 12.) And the values of the new immigrants are those historically prized in America—devotion to family and a strong work ethic.

Nevertheless these immigrants encounter hostility. They are accused of stealing jobs from native-born Americans and downgrading neighborhoods, among other things. Korean "mom-and-pop" stores have been attacked and boycotted. The *Washington Post* recently carried a headline: "Anti-Asian American Incidents Rising, Civil Rights Group Says." Although we are a nation of immigrants, such hostility to every new group has been common throughout our history.

In the very first years of the republic, Pennsylvania residents of English origin protested the influx of the German-born. Before midcentury, the Know-Nothing party accused the immigrant Irish of Romish plots. The Poles, Czechs, and others who later manned the mines and steel mills were objects of sneers and opprobrium. Asian-exclusion statutes, beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, were enacted well into the present century. Refugees from the Irish famine encountered "No Irish Need Apply" signs in Boston and New York. Italians were stigmatized as probable mobsters. Japanese-American *citizens* were forced out of their homes into internment camps during World War II. Hostility toward immigrants is long-standing.

Reviewer Stanley Karnow, discussing Joel Millman's current book, *The Other Americans* (Viking), says,

> But as Joel Millman amply illustrates, the case against immigrants is flimsy. By nature they are a superior breed. Knowing that they

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face adjustment problems in a strange and probably hostile environment, they are nevertheless ready to leave their homelands in hope of improving their lives. And, while they often encounter difficulties, on the whole they contribute significantly to the American economy as entrepreneurs, craftsmen, farmers, and unskilled workers. Their crime rate is remarkably low, and contrary to allegations that they are a fiscal burden, they generate more tax revenues than they take in service (*Washington Post Book World*, July 20).

The effects of immigration have not always been quite as rosy as Millman describes and the success of immigrants in entering the economy not always quite as immediate. The story of the famine Irish is a case in point. It is only in the last few years that the Irish of Eire itself and the members of the Irish diaspora have begun to acknowledge the fact of the famine and to come to terms with it. "It is a great source of shame for many people," said Mary Robinson, Ireland's former president. "It shouldn't be. It is our history, in Ireland, in Boston. To learn from history, you must know it."

Unlike the sturdy Irish immigrants who arrived in the 1820s and 1830s, the refugees from the famine who flooded into East Coast cities in the 1840s were pallid, emaciated, weak, impoverished, and unskilled, according to Thomas O'Connor, Boston College historian and author of *The Boston Irish*. Many were ill with typhus, smallpox, and cholera. It is understandable that they were not wholly welcome. Nevertheless, they and their descendants transformed Boston, the most Irish of American cities, and other centers as well.

In a long and well-researched story in the *Boston Sunday Globe* (August 24) marking the unveiling of the first American memorial for famine victims, Kevin Cullen traced the transition of Boston from a city of Yankee reserve and elitism to a city where it has been said, "We're all a little Irish by osmosis." The Boston preference for "sports, politics, and revenge," its proliferation of pubs, and rough-and-tumble politics influencing the region's social order: All are marks of that transition according to Cullen—not all positive marks it must be said.

But historian O'Connor puts a more positive spin on the transformation: "The Boston Irish have become people of education, culture, and refinement. To a great extent, in their prolonged struggle for survival and achievement, they did turn Boston into an Irish city." For that reason he concludes that they have a special obligation to return to the city the benefits of the skills, the associations, and resources they have acquired, and thus help new immigrant peoples to share their advantages.

The way in which the Irish changed Boston and its region is perhaps the most dramatic story of immigration changing America. But there are many others. Millman, for example, credits recent immigrants with reviving New York. "Going into derelict ghettos, they have refurbished crumbling buildings and created middle-class neighborhoods." If we study the history of immigration we are certainly encouraged to acknowledge the changes newcomers bring and to welcome them as renewers of our strength as a nation. □

George W. Grayson

IS THE PARTY OVER?

Political pluralism in Mexico

Caesars and generals returning to Imperial Rome following military conquests detailed husky-voiced young men to jog alongside their chariots. As frenzied crowds cheered for the exultant heroes, the runners would scream into their ears, "You are not a god, you are not a god!"

Regrettably, Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) never recruited anyone to provide a similar reality-check to its political paladins. After monopolizing the presidency and dominating the Mexican Congress since 1929—often through coercion, corruption, and chicanery—the PRI came to regard its hegemonic position as preordained. Indeed, *priístas* tended to view their major adversaries—the center-right National Action Party (PAN) and the leftist-nationalist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)—as conniving devils rather than the loyal opposition.

Thus, Government Secretary Emilio Chuayffet Chemor—the country's virtual prime minister and an aspirant to succeed President Ernesto Zedillo when he leaves office in three years—appeared incredulous when the PRD rolled to a two-to-one victory in the July 6 Mexico City mayoral race. At the same time, the PRI lost its majority in the 500-member Chamber of Deputies but continued its dominance in the Senate, where only a quarter of the seats were open.

Soon after the election, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, coordinator of the 125-deputy PRD delegation, phoned his PRI counterpart, Arturo Núñez Jiménez, to explore mutual interests in the next Congress which would convene on September 1. In reaction to Núñez's vague response, "I'll get back to you in a week or two," Muñoz Ledo turned to PAN, possessed of 121 seats, and the small labor and environmental parties that together commanded 12 seats. Protracted negotiations among the disparate groups crystallized into a four-party opposition bloc. Even though the bloc represented 259 deputies compared to the PRI's 239, Chuayffet indulged in the illusion that the variegated coalition would collapse in a few days.

When the bloc preserved its unity, Chuayffet, Núñez, and Senate Majority Leader Genovevo Figueroa even toyed with the idea of boycotting the September 1 organizational session or setting up their own Chamber of Deputies. Ultimately, Zedillo vetoed such machinations, which—if carried out—could have chilled private investment in a year when

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the GDP should shoot up 5 percent amid falling prices. As a result, the new Congress met on schedule: Muñoz Ledo, the opposition bloc's choice, assumed the Chamber's presidency; *panista* Carlos Medina Plascencia took the gavel as chairman of the key Rules and Internal Governance Committee; Zedillo delivered an upbeat, statistics-laden address to the nation; and Núñez and company sulked in their seats.

Despite its initial success, will the opposition bloc maintain its cohesion? If so, will it attack privatizations, NAFTA, and other neoliberal policies adopted over the last twelve years? How will the presence of a more assertive Congress influence the presidential election in 2000?

Facing down the PRI has greatly emboldened bloc leaders. Now they seem determined to shed Congress's image as a collection of single-term lickspittles eager to ingratiate themselves with the executive branch with a view to seeking a job when their terms expire. Although talking about an "historic validation of the popular will," the four parties will probably emphasize what could be described as a funnel strategy; namely, they will identify common ground on relatively uncontroversial issues before carefully broadening their agenda. They'll probably begin by scrutinizing various presidential discretionary funds. Next, they may fine-tune the despised 15 percent Value-Added Tax (IVA) by reducing the levy on essentials while raising the charge on luxuries. Then, they could back educational, health, housing, and job-training programs for the poor on whom Zedillo has pledged to spare 56 percent of his program budget.

Only a Mexican Dr. Pangloss could expect the alliance to endure for more than a year or so. Undoubtedly, interparty frictions will spring up in the course of ten gubernatorial elections scattered throughout 1998. After the smoke clears, the run-up to the next presidential election will unleash centrifugal forces as both the PRD and PAN try to oust the PRI from *Los Pinos*, the presidential palace.

In fact, President Zedillo evinces more interest in sustained growth than in politics. He and Finance Secretary Guillermo Ortiz Martínez, another presidential hopeful, have turned around an economy savaged by the toxic 1994-96 recession, a major factor in the anti-PRI vote. The two now want to deepen and expand privatizations, even as they continue to impel freer trade within the context of NAFTA and other accords. Meanwhile, Muñoz Ledo and his PRD colleague, Mexico City mayor-elect Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, have excoriated economic liberalization for sparking high unemployment, small-business failures, and the widening gap between "haves" and "have-nots." Nonetheless, now that the PRD enjoys a position of power, it seems reluctant to trumpet a return to the protectionism, statism, and subsidies that reigned until the mid-1980s. Efforts to reverse the local version of *perestroika* could frighten investors, curb the incipient economic growth, and darken the now "moderate" PRD's chances of capturing the presidency. Thus Muñoz Ledo and Cárdenas are emphasizing gradual, "prudent" steps to uplift the 50 percent of their countrymen who live as ragpickers in fetid slums or forlorn villages. With respect to NAFTA, the PRD now recommends minor adjustments rather than a sweeping overhaul of the pact.

On the other hand, the PAN has shown more aggressiveness on economic questions, recommending—for example—lowering the IVA to 10 percent and the income tax from 34 to 30 percent. Privately, their spokesmen admit that these extremely popular proposals are designed to regain momentum lost by their party when it finished third in the midsummer competition for the capital's city hall—a race it was supposed to win. In view of their sagging fortunes, many *priístas* in the Chamber of Deputies may support populist initiatives. Should they pass, Zedillo and Ortiz Arana will turn heaven and earth to kill them in the Senate, lest a sharp loss of revenue compromise the size and pace of the economic recovery.

Had voters elected a president instead of legislators in 1997, the PRI would have won, having garnered a plurality of the ballots cast (39.1 percent). Nevertheless, unless his floundering party assigns slogan-shouting youths to run alongside its official vehicles to remind its mucky mucks of the pitfalls of hubris and internecine warfare, thirty-eight months from now Zedillo may find himself turning over the keys to *Los Pinos* to an opposition politician. □

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RESPECT

An Italian-American story

Alane Salierno Mason

It is a love and a rage.

The love you already know about, lurking in all the clichés of ethnicity: pungent, generic. Like garlic, it stays with you.

You already know: the smell of garlic frying. On a Sunday morning, grandmother with fleshy arms in a housedress, swaying as the kitchen cabinets open and shut, the refrigerator opens and shuts: basil, big cans of tomatoes, the golden blocky pillar of a tin of olive oil, meat for the *braciole* to spread with Crisco and breadcrumbs and spices, green bean and potato salad, chilled. A hard block of pale tart cheese to grate for the table. Grandfather wearing his best vest and ruby ring and cologne for the midday meal, having washed up for company after coming in from the garden with zucchini flowers to be basted in egg and breadcrumbs and fried in olive oil. As each aunt and uncle, cousin and second cousin arrives, a kiss for everyone in the room. The great uncle with the cigar, the favorite great aunt with freckled arms hardy as a hazelnut. Relatives from the Bronx, New City, Paterson, Saddle River, Suffern, Croton-on-Hudson, all strung like beads from the landings on Ellis Island. Wine, mixed half-and-half with sweet soda for the children. The long table with the lace tablecloth, hours later strewn with orange and apple peels and the hulls of walnuts and roasted chestnuts, to be cleared away and thrown in the fireplace before black coffee and anisette are poured.

In the summer, the fruit peels and the nut hulls might be thrown in the garden. "What comes out of the ground goes back into the ground," my grandfather always says as he throws the peelings from the kitchen between the tall stakes of the tomato plants. "Nothing wasted. You get out of the ground what you put into the ground" (referring to the seedlings that sometimes sprouted from discarded peach pits), "and what comes out of the ground goes back in. Dear granddaughter, I'm telling you something very important: you get out of life what you put into it."

When he came to America he had delivered eggs and milk, worked in a laundry and a candy factory, became an apprentice plasterer and ultimately a building contractor, constructing and renovating churches and schools. "You got to have a good foundation," he always told me, pointing out cracked pavement a year after new road work was done, peeling paint in places where no one had bothered to scrape the old coat. "You have to take pride in your work. The problem with this country, nobody anymore takes pride in his work."

And also, "It's very important to have respect for the old people. They know something about life you don't know. Dear granddaughter, listen to what I say: you have to have respect."

II

In the brownstone neighborhood where I live in Brooklyn, there are many old ladies, as hardy to the eye as olive trees. One of these, Mrs. Gianquito, lived on the ground floor

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of the building I lived in when I moved here ten years ago. She used to cry when I saw her: "*Sono sola, sola sola*!" ("I'm alone, alone, alone!"). Sometimes I sat beside her in the building's tiny courtyard, separated from the street by a short iron fence, keeping her company while she talked to me in an Italian I couldn't understand. Perhaps it was mostly dialect, or perhaps because I spoke a few words she granted me perfect comprehension, and spoke very rapidly. In any case, of her torrent of words I understood only "*sola*," and this single saying: "*Se si rispetta, si sera rispettata*." "If you respect others, others will respect you." Or did it mean, more literally, "If you respect yourself, you will be respected"?

My grandfather was born in Naples in 1908, and Brooklyn was the first place he lived when he came to America in 1920. He met my grandmother when his eldest sister married a widower, also Italian, with four daughters born in America, one exactly his age. Later they lived in the Bronx, then in Italian East Harlem, and finally in upstate New York, where I was born. I moved to Brooklyn in 1987, a year after I graduated from college. My grandfather said, "I spent my life trying to get the family out of Brooklyn, and now you're going backwards, back where I started!" Now he says, "I'm going to shoot that Brooklyn Bridge!," because he imagines it transporting me away from the family.

In this neighborhood of four- and five-story buildings with gardens in the front and back, there are grapevines growing on the telephone wires. My neighbor yells to her kids, "Get in hee-yah!" On Saturdays in the supermarket the old ladies' carts jam up against each other; they trade Italian gossip about their friends and advice about different brands. The men stand outside the bakery or in the doorways of their social clubs: The Society of Citizens of Pozzallo. The building with the ground floor wine shop was owned by the proprietor's grandparents; his grandfather used to make wine in barrels in the back yard, he says, and when he hosed out the barrels the yard was stained purple. The grandson, in his thirties, has lived here all his life; when he decided to open the store everyone he knew told him he could not succeed, but there has been an influx of Manhattanites into the neighborhood and the store thrives. He flirts with all the young women who go into Manhattan to work. Yet his store hasn't launched him into their world, he is still a fixture of the neighborhood. If he took the subway into Manhattan, he says, he would have to carry a gun, because of the *melanzane*: eggplants, or black people. (And perhaps the *finucchi*: fennel, or gays.)

At the neighborhood church my old landlady Mrs. Amaroso used to call the "*cathedrale*," there is a Rosary Society, a Cabrini Club, and the Our Lady of Loreto Council Columbiettes; they sponsor card games and trips to Atlantic City, and, a few times a year, accompany a statue of the Virgin Mary in promenade around the streets. On Good Friday, the women wear black and carry candles in a funeral procession around a wax figure of the dead Christ in a glass casket. The casket is born aloft by burly darkhaired men wearing medals on long red ribbons around their necks.

It was the smell in the bakeries that drew me here, the strong smell of childhood, sharing my grandfather's expectation of an occasion, a holiday or Sunday company. The freshbaked *anisette* biscuits and *regine* (sesame) and *pignoli* (pine nut) cookies, the *cannoli* and *sfogliatell'* and *pasticciott'*, the boxes tied with red-and-white string. These Brooklyn bakeries even carry Manhattan Coffee Soda, the sweet, carbonated espresso in a small glass bottle with an old-fashioned yellow label. There are also half a dozen places in the neighborhood where they make homemade mozzarella, the firm strings of cheese dripping moisture. My second cousin Roseangela in the Bronx has been making it in her father's deli since she was eleven. When I was a child and my grandfather brought this kind of mozzarella home, I would eat it right from the milky wet waxed paper it was wrapped in while my grandmother made us *mozzarell' in carozz'*, in a carriage, that is, between two pieces of bread, dipped in egg and breadcrumbs, then baked in the oven.

My grandfather usually buys his pastries in New Jersey, but since I've lived here I like to bring him the real thing from Brooklyn, where they're better and cheaper. Each holiday, now, I can expect a call with his "order" (*roccoco* and *mustacioli* for Christmas, *sfingi* and *zeppole* for Saint Joseph's Day), which I bring to him in the big white boxes tied with red and white string. Sometimes I will remember to ask the bakery for additional small boxes, for my grandfather always buys enough to give away. This is very important, that no visitor should leave the house empty-handed. Between my grandparents' house and my mother's, I am always carrying cheese, vegetables, fruit, half a vat of soup, half a loaf of bread. An Italian-American writer once told me that his mother made him take home half an onion; "take it, you might need it, I'm not gonna use it," she'd said.

For four of my first five years in Brooklyn I dated an Italian-American lawyer living across the street, who made *biscotti* from his grandmother's recipe, and on Sundays liked to make a marinara sauce, and espresso with a shot of anisette. His landlady, sitting in a chair on the building stoop, would stop me as I went in to tell me how he did his own laundry and cooking and housecleaning, that he was "*un ragazzo buono, oggi e difficile a trovare, un ragazzo buono*," a good boy, the kind difficult to find these days. I wanted my children to have Italian traditions, to know themselves as something other than just plain American. There is no greater family occasion—none so garlanded with expectation—than an Italian wedding.

When my old building was sold, I stayed in the neigh-

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borhood. On the old block there was a man in a wheelchair whose friends always gathered on his stoop. When I told him I was moving a few blocks away, he said, "Eh, you're moving up, you'll find a different class of people over there."

Up in the country, when my grandfather moved houses for the first time in forty years, he took with him a couple of wheelbarrows full of topsoil, and several of his favorite rocks.

I, too, collect stones from many of the places I've been.

III

On Sundays, the stairwell of my building smells of garlic frying in oil, of marinara sauce or zucchini in breadcrumbs. The landlady and landlord I have had, now, for the past five years, are not, as far as I can tell, a different class of people from those a few blocks away. Umberto immigrated in the fifties and still does not speak English well; Rosa was born in this building, where her senescent mother lived with her in the same three rooms on the ground floor until her death.

Like my grandfather, I have a sociable streak, and once in a while, like to have an out-of-town guest, or friends over to eat and talk. This is one of my great joys—or was, before Umberto started standing on the doorstep at the beginning of a dinner party shouting "this is not a club!" and interrogating guests, male or female (including a seventy-year-old former teacher) about what they were doing here, and how soon they were leaving.

Unlike my grandparents, who have been married for sixty-five of the seventy-two years since they first met, I have been serially monogamous, and remain unmarried. Shortly after I moved here, the Italian lawyer moved to California. In the months of his ultimatum, as I tried to bring myself to decide to marry him, or not, I often lay awake at night, alone, trembling with anger or sorrow.

When I started seeing someone else, Rosa began standing at her front window, peeking through the curtains, whenever she heard more than one set of footsteps on the stairs. Now that I have had a man in my life more seriously (truly, the most seriously) for over a year, Umberto and Rosa have become increasingly agitated. First, when Umberto saw him on the stairs, he raised the rent fifty dollars. Then Rosa started calling on the telephone. "I wanna know what's goin' on up there, that guy, he's been there for a week!" That time, he'd been visiting a day or two from the distant city where he is a university professor. "It's none of your business!" I said indignantly, thinking for a moment that I was in America. Rosa shouted back, "None of my business! Every week I see a different guy, what'ya do, take every guy in the neighborhood into your bed?" That month, I had had two other male visitors and a work-related dinner party. I asked my dinner guests to tiptoe down the stairs when they left so as not to disturb the landlords. "The other night you had six people over," Rosa added, "and I didn't hear any of them leave. Whaddya have them all sleepin' over?"

I went downstairs to sit at her kitchen table. "Rosa, there must be some kind of misunderstanding; I'm not the person you say I am," I tried to tell her, but she insisted. "I have to worry about your reputation," she said. "Rosa," I said, "Let me worry about my own reputation. I have a very good reputation."

"People around here, they talk," she said. "They ask me, what'sa matter with that girl, she's got so many boyfriends? And I says to them, I donno, they're friends of hers. But I gotta look out for your reputation, and the reputation of the house!"

I explained that I had friends in Washington, in California, in North Carolina. "When they come to visit, I shouldn't offer them a place to stay? I'm a hospitable person, I'm Italian!" I tried to tell her. She said, "You wanna have foreigners? Let them find a hotel. Listen to me, you do what I say, you'll be happier. They'll respect you for it. And don't worry, you'll get married eventually, because you're good-lookin'. I'm tellin' ya, listen to me, because I'm tellin' ya for your own good, don't go with a guy just because he likes you. Make sure he has a job!" I rolled my eyes. She said, "Don't you look at me that way, I'm tellin' ya the truth!" As I left, she said, "I'm tellin' ya for your own good! My father would've killed me if I so much as looked at a boy, and I tell ya I'm glad I was brought up that way, to respect myself."

Over the years I've tried giving my landlords plants, homemade *panettone* and gingerbread, a bottle of *anisette*, a pleading letter written in Italian. I stopped having parties. I've tried to tell them I want to be left alone to live in peace, in my own way, in my own home. I've tried to rationalize: Maybe there's too much noise on the stairs? Maybe they come from the mountains of Sicily, and are so suspicious of strangers that they can't stand to see anyone around they don't know? Perhaps because they see me in church, because they know I have Italian blood, they think I should live exactly as they do? "A relative, once in a blue moon, it's all right," Rosa once said to me. "I don't have parties, why do you have to have parties?"

My friends say, get a lawyer to write your landlords a letter. They have no right to harass you; you're a good tenant, you're hardly ever there, you're always working, even when you're home you're working, you're quiet, you pay your rent on time. But the law doesn't matter here, I know, it is the kitchen table that matters.

The next time my boyfriend was in town, the next time the phone rang from the landlords' downstairs, I tried to be respectful, I took him to meet Rosa. We both paid our respects at the kitchen table. She asked him what his intentions were. Satisfied, she delivered her verdict: "He looks like a nice guy, an intelligent guy. If you're goin' steady, and he's the only one, it's all right.

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But if I see any other guys around here, I'm gonna snitch on ya! I told her she'd find someone eventually, because she's goodlookin'." I rolled my eyes again. "She doesn't believe me, but I'm tellin' her the truth!"

Then he was away for a month, then here for three days in one week: Rosa called up and said, "What's he livin' with you?"

I want to point out that I am a different class of people. I want her to understand that I am respectable, a professional, that I take pride in my work. Yet each time she calls, I shake with anger, then burst into tears. If I were a true American, wouldn't I be living someplace where no one cares what I do?

When my boyfriend and I went to pick up the drycleaning, the lady who runs the laundromat asked me, "who's he?" and when I shyly said, "*mio amico*," she gave him a complete report: I was "*una buona ragazza, educata, rispettosa, fa i fatti suoi, non riguarda nessuno*" (a good girl, well-mannered, respectful, does her own thing, doesn't look at other guys). The next time I saw her, she advised me to find another man, younger, and see both of them for a while, then decide. She asked what my family thought, and I said only that my mother did not approve. I did not say that my grandparents do not know he exists. He is not Italian, not Catholic, divorced, sixteen years older, and has a beard. My grandfather hates beards—he considers facial hair a sign of disrespect. And ever since a second cousin married a divorced man with children, both of my grandparents have been saying, "Why couldn't she find a single guy?"

My mother says my grandfather will have a heart attack if I bring my boyfriend to meet him. But without my saying any of this, the laundromat woman said, "*Non odi tua mama*," don't hate your mother, it's natural for a mother to be concerned about such things.

Then there is the man in the family-owned fruit market who flirts with me in front of his mother and brother, but when he asks me why I'm not married yet, such a *bella ragazza*, I know how to behave: flattered, embarrassed, not scornful but reserved, proper. Sometimes he tells me it's better not to get married; that's when I know he has had a fight with his wife. I don't know if he has yet spotted me with my *fidanzato*, or what he will say, but this is not the neighborhood to live in if you want a life protected from the eyes of strangers.

Rispettare, to respect, has the same root as *aspettare*, to wait, to expect. To expect something is to look *toward* its arrival; to respect, then, must be to look *again*, maybe to see the same thing from another point of view, through someone else's spectacles. When my grandfather always says, this generation of today, these kids of today have no respect, I think he is telling the truth. They are full of disregard—*riguardare* also means to look again—they look away. While the evil eye must see in one direction only. Looking at Rosa, I think I begin to understand why in tribal cultures and small villages, people needed protection from the evil eye.

The other day, Rosa tried to raise the rent a second time in six months, and I refused. While she called me "you sonuvabitch, you *tramp*," I slammed the door in her face. I had had enough. I, too, was raised to respect myself.

A week before Christmas in this neighborhood, they begin selling fish for the Christmas Eve feast—the *stocca*, the *baccala*, or salt cod, the eels, the *vongole*, or clams—from the back of a truck parked near the fruit market, in front of the bank. They also do this in the south of Italy. Some mornings in summertime, when I look out my window in slanting morning light over the low buildings to see Umberto watering his fig tree in his white sleeveless undershirt and long black shorts with black kneesocks, and I hear someone shouting in Italian in the street, I don't know what country I'm in.

IV

You might say I have a bad case of third generation-itis. I did go to Italy to see the town my grandfather was born in. I saw the dry-goods shop my great-grandmother used to run in the corner of their house, the church bell my grandfather used to ring in the dusty town with onions drying on the rooftops and horse-drawn carts returning from the fields. Somewhere near Naples, my great-grandfather might be buried. The first of my ancestors to come to America, he was also the only one to set foot again on Italian soil. He did not sponsor his wife and children to follow him to this country. Eventually they came anyway, sponsored by other, more distant relatives. "That's a mystery," my grandfather says. He tells of how, when he got off the boat in America, his father came to meet them but he did not recognize him, did not know which man was his father. Shortly after that, his father got sick, and went back to Italy to die. Or so my grandfather was told. He had been working in a leather factory in Newark, my grandfather told me; because of my grandfather's accent, I thought it was a *ladder* factory; before that, I had confused this great-grandfather with another relative who had made decorative wrought iron, like the grillwork I see everywhere in Brooklyn.

In Naples, I stayed with the daughter of my grandfather's cousin, a grade-school English teacher. When I arrived, she had already read my mail. My Italian cousins could not understand why I was quiet; they thought I was melancholy, depressed. They did not understand the meaning of privacy, or solitude. And when they shouted, I couldn't understand they were just enjoying a conversation; I thought I had made them angry. They would not let me go anywhere alone. They wanted to introduce me: "This is our cousin from America. Her mother was divorced. Do you know that in America, the fa-

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thers don't come home for lunch with their families? That's why there's so much divorce."

My cousin said she could understand why I wasn't married yet: I didn't have to live with my parents, I lived alone, I had my freedom. Her husband shouted: are you sorry you met me? are you sorry you have these children? what's the most important thing, love or freedom? you want freedom over love? what is freedom compared to love! love!

You might say I have a bad case of third generation-itis.

We took a picture to bring back to my grandfather of a distant relative, a stout old woman in black—she tried to pull a small boy to her, but he pulled away: he was afraid of having his picture go to America. The old woman cried, and my cousin said to me, "Is your grandfather also very emotional? Yes? You see, they are related."

V

My grandfather, I understand now, is an idealist of a sort. He has strong ideas about how things *should* be. He was not easy on his children, and disapproved of each of their marriages (one too young, another from the wrong side of the tracks, another, an artist whom he threatened to shoot) and even now, thirty and forty years later, they have not forgotten. It is a close family full of distances. Lately, when something happens my grandfather does not understand—when the family does not all come together on a holiday, for instance, or we show up at his house at different times— he has taken to saying, "I must have been born in the wrong country," or simply, "I was born in the wrong place."

He is susceptible to rhetoric: family values, God and country, productivity, not tax and spend. He loves politics, and ran for local office three times on his own "Productivity" ticket before finally winning over those whose partisans called him "uneducated" and "a foreigner." Since Hoover was president when he became an American, he became a Republican, to express his loyalty to his new country; but his Italian best friend, a former head gardener for a big estate, is a Democrat, a tall bony man with a freckled forehead, always neatly dressed in jacket and checked shirt and wide florid tie. They are both nearly ninety, and like to argue about things on which they don't really disagree: "If we only made a dollar, we were glad to have that dollar, as long as we had a job!" "These kids don't have respect and nobody tells them any different, not the parents, not the church!" My grandmother, who doesn't talk much, doesn't participate in the debate; she says her rosary and votes as my grandfather votes. Once he complained that my grandmother never wants to have a discussion; for sixty-five years of marriage, he told her how to vote, now he wants to have a discussion?

Recently my grandfather told me about his friend who was a friend of Caruso, and how Caruso was given a title by Mussolini. I said I didn't think a title from Mussolini was anything to be proud of. My grandfather said, I know, he made that mistake, making friends with Hitler. I said, even without Hitler, he was a fascist, he was a bad egg. My grandfather looked confused. Hadn't he told me from childhood that Mussolini made the trains run on time, just as Marconi invented the telegraph?

I always argue. Well, not always; sometimes I boil in silence, or gently demur, depending on the subject. My grandmother told me once she loves to hear me talk, I talk so nice: grammatically and with a big vocabulary. Neither does my grandfather seem to mind that I disagree with him. With me, he doesn't consider it a sign of disrespect. He always told me he wanted me to grow up to be president, though when Ferraro ran for vice-president, he thought it a bad risk—what if we ended up, God forbid, with a lady president? I reminded him of his plans for me, and he laughed. "That's different," he said, and when I asked why, he answered, "Because you're my granddaughter." When he complains about this generation of today, and I try to defend us, he says, "I don't mean you."

My grandfather points out that it is impractical for unmarried people to live apart from their families: "two phone bills, two electrical, two water bills, heat, groceries." I say, "Grandpa, we don't pay for water in the city." He says, "The landlord pays, but you pay in the rent. You're working for the landlord."

He says, "The problem with this country is no one has time for family. It used to be, everyone came together for Sunday dinner, and they spent the day, eating, and talking hours went by, the whole day! Now they eat and run, an hour and then they're off to play golf, if they give you two hours it's a miracle! The problem with this country is career before family. You live to work, instead of work to live!"

He says, "I want to see the mothers home with the children, the way it should be, not the child comes home and the house is empty. A man should bring home the bacon, the wife, put it in the pan..." and laughs.

He says, "I want you to know, dear granddaughter, that family is the most important thing."

VI

As for the rage close to grief, you may know that too: like parsley, curly or flat, bitter, individual.

My grandmother suffers from what she calls "nervous tension." Each Christmas, before preparing the Christmas Eve feast, of eels and macaroni with fish sauce and lobster, she disintegrates into days of hiccuping, burps, and sobs, her eyes rubbed red under her glasses, sometimes not even wearing her wig to cover the baldness caused by menopause. Her sons argue and cajole, offer to have the dinner elsewhere, at a restaurant; my grandfather refuses, says they will stay home, "right away he steams up, gets so excited," my grandmoth-

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er says; at the last minute she recovers and the dinner is cooked. Her children say that next year they will do it differently; each year it is the same, even when they bring over the main dishes ready cooked: still the bald head with wisps of white, the red-rimmed eyes, the burping, the wishing to die; my grandfather decorates the house with blue lights and flashing multicolored rosettes still in the box; I roast the nuts, set the table, make the salad, mix the parsley, garlic and oil into the breadcrumbs to stuff the mushrooms; the dinner goes on; at the end, the table is strewn with orange and tangerine peels, the hulls of walnuts and chestnuts.

I wonder, with all the modern tools at hand: is it something in my grandmother's childhood, something about Christmas in the convent school where she and her sisters were raised by nuns? Was it that she learned to cook from her mother-in-law, and not from her mother, who died so young; is it the pressure of living up to the ways of an Old Country she herself never knew? Anger at the rigidity of expectation, the tyranny of ritual, the respect for authority, the insistence that certain truths not be uttered and certain feelings not be had? Either my grandmother herself does not know, or if she knows, has never told anyone. Or if she told my grandfather, for instance, he then has never told. Or if her doctor, he has only prescribed antidepressants, which she calls her "depression pills."

The past is inscrutable, but not my grandmother's radiance when, inexplicably happy again, the holidays past, she giggles and her eyes shine. In such good spirits, she will sometimes sing the songs she sang with the other girls as they worked in the garment district making wedding dresses, sewing thousands of tiny beads. "I want God to keep me living to see you a beautiful bride, then he can take me," she says. "I pray God finds you a good man, a good man like your grandfather."

My grandmother loves to crochet and sew, and would have liked to keep working, she once told me, but my grandfather wouldn't let her, once they could get by on his earnings alone. "It wouldn't look right," she said; he wanted to appear a man of means, he once told me he wanted to make Salierno a respected name in this country, as it had been in Italy. For the same reason he came home one day, to their apartment in a building full of relatives in Italian East Harlem, to tell my grandmother he had bought a house in the country, they were moving up and out, taking his mother with them.

In the country, within twenty minutes' drive (but she won't drive now, which leaves her housebound) of each of her brothers and her parents, my mother suffers, terribly, from the depression which struck each of her parents, as well as a premature decline from Parkinson's disease. Though her husband comes home at night, she is alone, alone, alone, alone! Each time I see her, she cries, "I wish you could come more often, when are you coming again, I wish you didn't have to leave!" She says, "I don't want you to have to quit your job," which means, of course, that in some part of herself she has already imagined, already wished that I will. And is it not the proper role for the only daughter of an only daughter in an Italian family, to care for her parents, for the old and the sick? What about my pride in my work? Isn't family the most important thing? What's more important, freedom or love?

If I don't visit for more than three weeks, my grandfather greets me, "Hello, stranger." My grandmother counts the weeks. My friends think I visit my family often; they don't understand that my living alone, visiting only thirty-six or forty-eight hours every two or three weeks, is one version of poverty, just as it is an American form of wealth. The expectations of my family are not those of a modernity so fluid it carries effortlessly along even nostalgia for the smell of the marinara sauce bubbling on the stove, the "Kiss Me, I'm Italian," the San Gennaro Festival in Little Italy—of an America where we might have the bakeries without the landlords.

Recently, when my grandparents both had the flu, I stayed away from the office to make them a big vat of chicken soup. While the soup was cooking and I sat working in the other room, I could hear my grandmother talking about me—loudly, because she'd taken out her hearing aids. "You know, Joe, I think she misses us," she shouted. "Do you hear me? I think that little child misses us. And I just have a feeling, she's going to bring us a lot of happiness one day. Yes, God is going to let us see her a beautiful bride, I just have that feeling."

In my church in Brooklyn, its walls lined with lurid statues of bleeding saints, two teen-age girls gossip in the pew, playing with a beeper, whispering loudly over the pages of a young adult novel. Three times I tell them to be quiet. Each time they ignore me. I tell them, "You may not want to be here, but that doesn't mean you have to be disruptive for people who do." They roll their eyes. These kids of today, they have no respect! My blood boils. I get steamed up right away. I have, I know, my grandfather's cardiovascular system, the same relation between blood and heart.

And some mornings, I wake up with my stomach in knots, burping like my grandmother. I have my grandmother's gut, which twists up with the knowledge that I am not, somehow, what I am expected to be.

VII

First the garlic, then the parsley, then the breadcrumbs and oregano; the landlord's fig tree, the back yard stained with wine; grandfather without a father, grandmother without a mother, holiday dinner with red-rimmed eyes, best vest coffee soda mozzarella black coffee anisette zucchini flowers orange peels hulls of walnuts roasted chestnuts kids today without respect love rage love. □

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NEITHER CAPITALIST NOR MARXIST

Karol Wojtyla's social ethics

Jonathan Kwitny

Romuald Kukolowicz, now in his seventies, is the son of Polish Catholic intellectuals. In 1953, he was working as a clerk. At the time, Poland was firmly part of Stalin's Soviet empire. During World War II, Kukolowicz had done work as an underground printer. Some friends from those days, now students at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, approached him, raving about a young professor whose lectures on Catholic ethics and communism were inspiring and ought to be published. Did Kukolowicz know anyone who could do it?

Kukolowicz found an underground printer in Lublin. His friends arranged for him to pick up the manuscript from the professor—Father Karol Wojtyla—at a convent in Krakow. As the manuscript was typed, edited, and published, there were more meetings between Kukolowicz and Wojtyla, but little small talk. "When I saw him it was always [to discuss] what to publish and how," Kukolowicz remembers. "It was a very strict conspiracy."

Some 250 reams of printing paper were stolen by the members of this "conspiracy" from the state institutions where they worked. A World War II press was used that required each page be rolled by hand over a typed matrix. Kukolowicz calculates that his friends had to press some 112,750 sheets of paper separately to make the book. It was published in two volumes, the first in 1953, the second the following year, with only 200 to 250 copies in each edition—loose pages in an envelope, to be bound, if desired, by the recipient. Copies went to priests who taught students in all the major cities of Poland. "They weren't given [directly] to students because of the need for secrecy," Kukolowicz says. "Police agents infiltrated the classes. If the security forces found such a book in your apartment, you would be subject to ten years in prison."

The work, called *Catholic Social Ethics*, is nowhere described in *Kalendarium* (the official diary of John Paul II's life up to his pontificate) or any other available literature; Kukolowicz's is the only copy I have encountered. The Vatican confirms his story. To my knowledge, this is the book's first public disclosure, and it belies much that has been written in the West about Wojtyla in recent years portraying the pope as an ally of free-market Western politicians.

Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, now secretary of the Polish episcopate but in 1954 a student in Wojtyla's social ethics course at the Jagiellonian, remembers being stunned to learn that Father Wojtyla had written a manual, several copies of which were passed around at the school. "It was impossible to publish a manual in those days," Bishop Pieronek explains. "All printers were registered by the government. Even typewriters were registered, but authorities allowed you to type. The university had a library, but the books were not accessible to the average reader. You can't imagine how libraries looked. Till the 1980s, whole lists of books were banned."

As a priest in the 1970s, Pieronek visited Cardinal Wojtyla for dinner and found parts of that old manual on a bookshelf in the dining room. "We learned about capitalism for the first time from Wojtyla's text," Bishop Pieronek recalls. "He tried to explain each system."

Catholic Social Ethics reinforces the notion that Wojtyla was a Thomist rather than a phenomenologist; it asserts at its inception that Aquinas's natural law "allows theories of ethics" to be stated with "scientific" precision. It also shows that by age thirty-three, Wojtyla had adopted unreservedly both the welfare-state economic ideas and the courage of Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, the Polish primate. No longer a novice or small-parish priest, Wojtyla instead marked himself in this book as a serious, innovative thinker with his eye on the world.

"The main task of the Catholic social ethic is to introduce the principles of justice and love into social life," Wojtyla wrote in the first volume, on politics. Tracing economic history from feudalism to the industrial age, he endorsed the Marxist notions of a working class and a class struggle. But he stressed that class should be among a person's secondary loyalties. Primary was the family, the success of which depended on its "close cooperation" with the church and the state. "The nation, as the natural society, must be respected," he wrote, but "the common good demands" a balance between "loyalty to the nation...and, on the other hand, avoidance of overzealous nationalism."

Government had "a superior function" that was "very useful in achieving the common good of society." Its power "comes directly from society, indirectly from God." Wojtyla condemned "individualism," a word that he and other

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Jonathan Kwitny *is a former features writer for the* Wall Street Journal. *His PBS series, "The Kwitny Report," won the George Polk Award for investigative reporting. This article is from* Man of the Century *by Jonathan Kwitny.* *Copyright © 1997, by Jonathan Kwitny. Reprinted by arrangement with Henry Holt & Company.*

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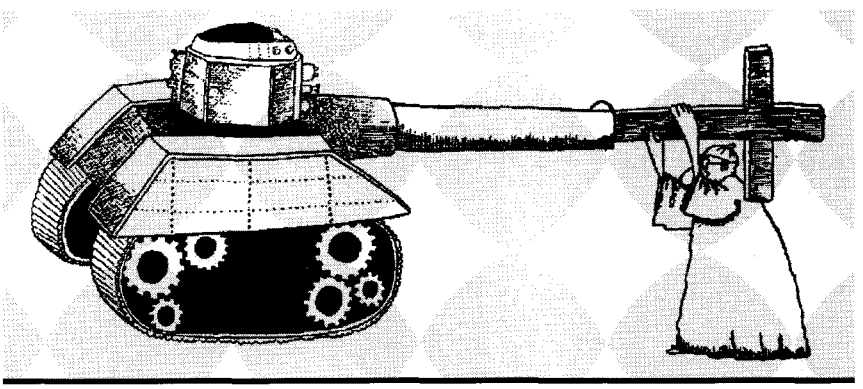
European scholars used to refer to unregulated capitalism. "Individualism and totalitarianism," he declared, "remain opposed to the principle of correlating the individual good and the social good, which Catholic ethics accepts."

"Justice and love" must govern international relations as well, he wrote: "War is evil. It should be avoided even as a last resort to restore justice between countries, because it may result in even greater evil and injustice than it combats." His statement on war went significantly beyond other current Catholic teaching, which allowed war if all else failed. Although many anti-Communists would later try to co-opt Wojtyla into their military policies, he condemned war unequivocally in 1953, even as a means to correct injustice, because he believed it tended only to create new injustice. (He did not, however, dispute Catholic teaching that violence could be used to repel violent attacks.)

In a chapter on Marxism, Wojtyla saw beyond the system that tyrannized his own life and into the issues that would later present themselves to him as pope. He wrote:

> The relentless materialism in Marxism contradicts Catholicism, [which] sees man as spirit and matter in one, [and which] proclaims the superiority of the spirit....Ethics is...the science of spiritual good, such as justice or love, that provides the material activities of human beings with specifically human values. This gives ethics primacy [over materialism] in economics or biology.



But, he added, "the goal of these thoughts is not to criticize Marxism entirely." He explicitly embraced Marx's essential theory that "the economic factor...explains, rather substantially, the different facts of human history....Criticism of capitalism—the system of exploitation of human beings and human work—is the unquestionable 'part of the truth' embodied in Marxism."

In 1993, John Paul II would provoke mocking headlines when he criticized Poland and other post-Communist countries for accepting pure market economics from the West and thus abandoning the "grain of truth" in Marxism. Although many thought the pope was reversing himself, he was in fact using almost the same words he had used forty years before in class lectures and in his book, and had been using ever since.

Wojtyla separated Marx's *analysis* of economic exploitation, which he largely accepted, from Marx's *solutions*, which he rejected. "The Catholic social ethic," he wrote in 1953, "agrees that in many cases a struggle is the way to accomplish the common good. Today...a class struggle...is the undeniable responsibility of the proletariat." Not only is class-conscious revolution compatible with Christianity, he argued; it is sometimes *necessary* to Christianity. What is incompatible is Marxism's subjugation of the individual human spirit to a grand economic design *after* the revolution.

In *Catholic Social Ethics*, Wojtyla set down rules for social struggle that are strikingly similar to those that would be enunciated less than a decade later by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in the United States. Wojtyla and King each believed the struggle should be aimed at persuasion, not at violent, Marxist-style upheaval. Wojtyla wrote:

> Demonstrations, protests, strikes, and passive resistance—all these are means of class struggle that need to be considered appropriate. The struggle for rights, after exhausting all peaceful means...is a necessary act of justice that leads only to the achievement of the common good, which is the goal of social existence....
>
> It is clear that from the view of the ethical assumptions of the Bible, such a struggle is a necessary evil, just like any other human struggle....It is also evident from the Bible that struggle itself is not the opposite of love. The opposite of love is hate.
>
> A struggle in a specific case does not have to be caused by hate. If it is caused by social and material injustice, and if its goal is to reinstate the just distribution of goods, then such a struggle is not [hatred]....Social justice is the necessary condition for realization of love in life....
>
> Many times Jesus Christ has proven that God's kingdom cannot be achieved in man without a struggle....Achievement of social justice in one element of achieving God's kingdom on earth.

Wojtyla made a major distinction between revolution within a country and international war—though in some ways, the distinction seems paradoxical:

> Revolution causes much more damage than war, because the unity of the natural society—the nation or state—is much greater than the international unity of humanity that gets torn in war....Hatred for those who are close to us is much more dangerous and inflicts much more damage than hatred for people who are further removed.

Yet, war, he said, isn't permissible and isn't likely to improve conditions. Revolution, though best avoided, *is* permissible and *can* improve conditions:

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Can the opposition that brings down [an unjust] government surpass all the damage that was caused by an armed struggle, and thus make the revolution ethically justified? The answer is yes....

It can be accepted that the majority of the people who have taken part in revolutions—even violent ones—have acted on their convictions, in accordance with their consciences....

Such a struggle is a necessary evil. Although it does not have to be an act of hatred...such a struggle undoubtedly provides an opportunity for acts of hatred....One can hate negative characteristics of human beings. But one cannot hate the human being himself....

Marxism...does not see any other way to solve the burning social issues....Catholicism sees the possibility of solving...social issues by evolutionary means. The struggle of the oppressed classes against their oppressors becomes the stimulus for the evolution to proceed faster....

The class struggle...grows stronger when it meets resistance from the economically privileged classes. Pressure from the class struggle should bring appropriate changes in the socioeconomic system.

Although Marxism saw struggle as inevitable and desirable, Wojtyla goes on, "Catholicism cannot accept struggle as the principal ethical dictate....Regardless of all the factors that set people apart in society...there exist deeper factors that foster unity and solidarity."

Wojtyla's biggest problem with Marxism, though, wasn't its advocacy of struggle but its opposition to the institution of private property. Grappling with this forced him to think through, perhaps for the first time in print, what Saint John of the Cross had said about material wealth. The question must have crossed Wojtyla's mind before: If Saint John, about whom Wojtyla had written a dissertation in Rome in 1948, had been right about abandoning physical property, why weren't the Communists right about it? The answer, Wojtyla decided, lay in distinguishing worthy ideals from practical possibilities. Marxism, he wrote, sought

> a classless society. To achieve this order, one must get rid of private property because it is the only source of class opposition....
>
> While the church clearly sees and proclaims the need for reform of the socioeconomic system, it does not consider necessary a radical upheaval in attitude toward property....The re-creation of the socioeconomic system may be achieved while maintaining the institution of private property, and should be based on the enfranchisement of the proletariat.

Wojtyla's rationale for private property differed from that of free-market theorists, and what he wrote about it makes for fairly explosive reading in the 1990s: "The church realizes that the bourgeois mentality, and capitalism with its material spirit, are contradictions of the Bible. According to

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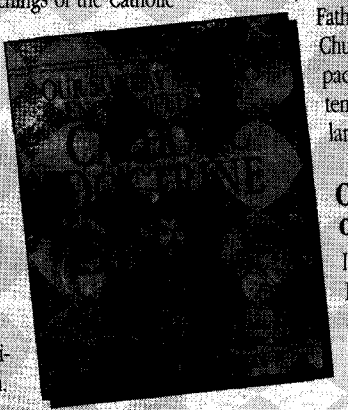

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the tradition of...monastic/religious life, the church also can appreciate the idea of communism....Communism, as a higher ethical rule of ownership, demands from people higher ethical qualifications."

After a subsection headed "The Objective Superiority of the Communist Ideal" (the text of which I was unable to obtain), Wojtyla noted,

> At the present state of human nature, the universal realization of this [Communist] ideal...meets with insurmountable difficulties. Private property is suited to human nature. The goal that should be pursued is to achieve, in the system based on private property, such reforms as will lead to the realization of social justice. The class struggle leads to this....
>
> Revolution is not the doom of society, but at most a punishment for specific offenses in socioeconomic life.

Wojtyla wrote that "ethical evil is caused" not by those wishing to rebel but "by those factors of the socioeconomic system that have spawned the need for a radical movement."

The second volume of *Catholic Social Ethics* was more specifically concerned with "rebuilding the economic system [and] defining the many moral obligations of owning and using property." Its premise was: "Because private ownership of property is ethically good if the property is used appropriately, individual owners and especially the state should carefully watch its use." Regarding labor, Wojtyla again rejected strict free-market doctrine, returning instead to the ideal of the Polish poet Cyprian Norwid (1821–83), that "work cannot be treated as merchandise." Regarding capitalism, Wojtyla said,

> An economic enterprise based on capital is ethically justified if it contributes to social prosperity. But if its main goal is to maximize the profit of the owner, then it is ethically wrong....
>
> The entire tradition and teaching of the church is clearly opposed to capitalism as the socioeconomic system of life, and as a general value system.
>
> The exchange of goods complements the economic process....Therefore it is ethically justified, like production, so long as it does not lead to unjustified, speculative profits....A just profit depends on a just price for merchandise, which is determined by using an appropriate value theory. Determination of the price is a function of society....
>
> [Because] money... is very important in the socioeconomic process...the state should supervise monetary and credit policies for the good of the whole society.

Wojtyla said that collecting interest on loans "is ethically justified, given the current state of the world's economy." But he said interest rates should be limited not by what the market will bear but by ethical considerations.

Wojtyla was very concerned with pay. "The profit gained

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from work in the form of compensation is the main factor in the just division of the income of society," he wrote. And "the just solution to the problem of pay is the principle of family pay." He has championed the "family pay" concept ever since, arguing that the size and needs of a worker's family should influence the amount of wages or salary. While this idea was somewhat Marxist (Marx said, "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs"), Wojtyla rejected the determination of compensation by need alone. "In determining family pay," he wrote,

> one should consider the economic state of the enterprise and of the whole country. An entrepreneur has a right to a reasonable, moderate profit, considering both his own work and his financial investment...for example, for renting land....

The common good is best achieved when individual members of society evenly attain material prosperity. So we must strive to limit luxury and excessive wealth.

The society must use all ethical means to save its members from poverty and lead them to prosperity. Society should take special care of those in poverty.

Rather than allying him with market capitalists, these views ring closer to those of supporters of "liberation theology," a Catholic movement that Wojtyla would later encounter in Latin America, which sought to redistribute capital. After several years of close reading of Wojtyla's published words as both priest and pope, I cannot cite an instance of his saying anything to contradict what he wrote in *Catholic Social Ethics*. □

SCREEN

Richard Alleva

JUST BUSINESS

'In the Company of Men' & 'The Game'

Near the conclusion of Neil LaBute's debut feature film, *In the Company of Men*, a woman, in tears and rage, slaps a man once, very hard. There is no other physical violence in the movie, yet *Company* is such a precise little study of well-channeled hate and disrupting love that, by the time that blow is delivered, you feel like a witness to a massacre. We have been told that love is stronger than hate. Perhaps that's true, but surely it is also true that love forces us to grow and growth is confusing and painful, while hate lets us curl up in the shell of ego, that all too cozy refuge. No slap, however hard, can crack that shell, or be but the faintest protest against love betrayed and tenderness despised. This seems to me the final, powerful import of a small and powerful film.

Two thirty-something executives, former college buddies Chad and Howard, are staying for six weeks in a nameless city to oversee some changes in a branch of their company. While discussing their recent romantic setbacks with women, they decide to avenge their sex by separately dating a young woman (good-looking but appraised by Chad as vulnerable because of her deafness), making her feel like a love goddess with two men under her thumb, and then abruptly dumping her. Naturally, things do not go precisely as planned.

I don't know if Neil LaBute has read *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* or seen one of its several screen adaptations, but his story progresses along the same narrative lines: a cold-blooded sexual intrigue enmeshing an innocent; civil war between the intriguers when one of them falls in love with his victim; finally, an unmasking of evil that brings as much pain to one of the predators as to his prey. My one major criticism of LaBute is that he does not allow the character of the more ruthless schemer, Chad, to expand within his evil the way Laclos amplified the malevolence of the Marquise de Merteuil in *Liaisons*. There is an O. Henry twist near the end of *Company* that injects another dose of grimness into an already mordant film, which is fine, but that also too cleverly pinpoints Chad's sadism as a mere characteristic of the ruthless business world.

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This movie begins with a whiff of fire and brimstone but concludes as an update of *The Organization Man*.

Yet most of *Company* is trenchant. The story unfolds through a series of duologues, each one of them written by a man who knows how to distill the colloquial into language that can sting, skewer or, more rarely, caress. And this is no marathon of talking heads because the director has an unfailing sense of where to place the camera and how long to leave it there. LaBute cuts from one shot to another not just with precision but with a sense of momentousness. Almost every shift of viewpoint indicates a shift in the narrative or an alteration of our perception of a character. For instance, we see Howard and an underling in the former's office while the executive fends off what seems to be an aggressive salesperson on the phone. This is in extreme long shot with the camera placed outside the office. Howard sends the underling off on an errand.

Cut to a close-up of Howard. The telephonic nuisance turns out to be Howard's mother pestering him about his love life. As Howard nervously ducks her questions, the underling returns. Cut to the former long-shot as Howard abruptly ends the conversation and turns, competent and brisk once again, to his subordinate. Seen from a distance, Howard is in charge but up close he is all nerves and evasiveness. This apparently trivial scene is actually a premonition of Howard's fate, for it is Howard's need to seem to be in control that entangles him in Chad's scheme, and it is his uncertainty about who he is and what he is worth that accelerates the concluding emotional smash-up.

LaBute presents us with marvelous disjunctions between what we hear and what we see. Chad talking to his pal about his first date with Christine (which we haven't witnessed) acknowledges her good looks but then mocks the way saliva gathers in the corner of her mouth as the deaf girl struggles to form sounds. Later, we see Christine speaking in close-up. She does indeed struggle with her speech but there's no saliva, no grotesqueness at all. This makes us realize that Chad must create a pathetic, repellent Christine in his mind's eye (and in Howard's) so that it will be easier to hurt her.

The photography by Tony Hettinger deftly captures the beige look, no, the beige *feel* of afternoon light seeping through blinds in spartanly furnished offices. The low-keyed atmosphere gives us a world where tiny savageries can take place daily with little fuss. (But a not-so-tiny savagery—Chad's forcing an intern to lower his pants in order to prove that the young man has the "balls" to succeed in business—doesn't come across as the black comedy that LaBute aimed for, but as grotesque nonsense that should have been left on the cutting-room floor.)

Aaron Eckhart easily encompasses the flippant brutality of Chad and even manages to expand what LaBute has written by introducing a note of boyish quizzicality. "Gee, how evil can I actually be?" Chad seems to wonder. Evil is his Disneyland, a new joyride around every corner. In the less magnetic role of Howard, Matt Malloy negotiates a double feat: first, he lets us see how a wimpy guy can contain a fair measure of venom; later, Malloy's powerful projection of Howard's desperation burns right through his wimpiness. As Christine, Stacy Edwards, who's not deaf, presents the handicap so unfussily that we just accept it, never finding it a source of pathos, and are thereby prepared for the *real* pathos of an intelligent woman groping her way through a peculiarly masculine brand of human darkness.

Another businessman and quite another sort of hoax are the centerpieces of *The Game*. Nicholas Van Orton (Michael Douglas) is an investment banker who crushes weak sister companies, forcibly retires kind old publishers, and—worst of all—snaps at waitresses, but he's beyond the enjoyment of power or anything else. On his forty-eighth birthday, Van Orton is haunted by the suicide of his father at the same age and seems to be inching toward the same fate. Then his dissolute younger brother brings a birthday present: enrollment in The Game, a recreation service that is supposed to lift the spirits of the jaded businessman by taking him on the urban equivalent of a safari. The thrills start small; in fact at first they're only irritations; briefcases don't open, toilets overflow, pens leak. But the misadventures escalate—and how!—until our hero wakes up in a crypt in a Mexican border town, *sans* money, credit cards, bank funds, business connections, the family mansion, identity papers, and perhaps without any identity at all. Fun, fun, fun. Van Orton decides to fight back.

The Game disarms the critics as ruthlessly as it divests its hero. You see, if I'm to obey the unwritten but iron rule that reviewers mustn't reveal surprise endings, I can't really specify the movie's one major fault. Suffice it to say that the perpetrators of the hoax could only have achieved their goal by having total control not just over Van Orton's schedule but over life itself, or at least over the entire city of San Francisco. Things fall into place for The Game all too easily and, thinking over the story after the end credits roll, most viewers will probably discover that the script just doesn't add up. *The Game* doesn't invite careful consideration or second viewings.

However, it's fun the first time around. The director David Fincher (maker of the powerfully gruesome *Seven* and the underrated third installment in the *Alien* series) specializes in doomy narratives and even doomier cityscapes. His main achievement here is to make us share the hero's growing apprehension that nothing is real, that rooms are stage sets, that *femmes fatales* are merely reciting lines, that the family lawyer is a scam artist, that people are beginning to resemble each other because they *are* each other. In such an environment, can we achieve self-determination only by arranging our own deaths? But, in such an environment, will even our suicides be stage-managed?

This movie is pop paranoia, Kafka for yuppies. We awake from its enjoyable nightmare only to confront the less encompassing but more veracious menaces of everyday life, the sort of menaces brilliantly on display in *In the Company of Men*. □

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Frank McConnell

FAITH & DOUBT ON THE TUBE

'Nothing Sacred'

In the premiere episode of ABC's "Nothing Sacred" (Thursdays at 8:00 P.M., Eastern), a younger priest and an older one are discussing the difficulties of living a life of faith. "My faith is simple," says the older one. "'When I see the world's glory/What can I say?/I do not think/I'll kill myself today.'" "Who's that, Chesterton?" asks the younger. "Lena Horne," replies the older, leaving the room.

Bingo.

The combination of wit, irony, and melancholy in that little bit of dialogue catches perfectly what's best, and to be warmly celebrated, about this rather fine new series. The writing is handsome and hip, the ensemble acting is right in the pocket, and *mirabile dictu*—it's a show about religious people that's actually *about* the religious—which, I'd say, is just the fully human—life.

It's also been attacked by the Catholic League as "morally offensive." Ghosts appear: of the fundamentalists who protested *The Last Temptation of Christ* (which was, if anything, too reverential) and "NYPD Blue" (which, in its first seasons anyhow, emerged as one of the most seriously and problematically moral things on the Tube). Condemning things before you've examined them is always a mug's game. Milton said so in the seventeenth century and so did Dr. Seuss in ours, in his great *Green Eggs and Ham*. You'd think folks would learn.

"Nothing Sacred" is set in an inner-city parish in a generically indeterminate big city. The staff includes Father Leo (the older guy who digs Lena Horne); Father Eric, newly ordained and longing for the certainties of monasticism rather than the velleities of the big city; Sister Maureen, devout and also insistent on calling God "Mother" as well as "Father"; Sidney, the accountant who is also an atheist ("I don't believe in God, but I like religion"); and, centrally, Father Ray, the pastor, thirtyish, committed to the priesthood and desperately, wryly unsure of the existence of God.

Okay, okay: that's pretty damn schematic. But this is *tee-vee*. And the opening episode is, well, a bit over the top, as are all opening episodes of series and most first paragraphs of novels. While fighting the city council to maintain his soup kitchen, Ray is also under criticism from his bishop because someone has been taping, and forwarding, his advice in the confessional to a young woman about abortion, and his advice is not exactly doctrinal. Plus—there's *plus*? Yep—it happens than a new kid in the parish school is the stepson of a former, preordination lover, now trapped in a loveless marriage. And Ray is getting back that old feeling, even going to meet the lady in a motel—where, natch, he bumps into some members of his flock.

Now that's a full plate for a fifty-minute pilot. But if you think melodrama is innately vulgar, then you oughtn't watch TV at all—or, for that matter, fool around with *Anna Karenina*. What makes the show work, and work it does, is that all its overheated and/or improbable subplots coalesce around a single, and quite serious, theme: Why do we try to live our lives to honor God when we're not *really* sure that He/She is even there?

One of my best friends in the world once told me that "anyone who thinks that religious life isn't melancholy doesn't know much about the religious life." What a smart thing to say, I thought. And then a few years later I read Karl Rahner's stunning definition, in *The Practice of Faith*, of what it is to be religious: it is "to believe that it is meaningful for a human being to speak into the endless desert of God's silence."

Okay, okay, again: it's a TV series, not a retreat, and it *mainly* wants you to buy the sponsor's product. But sometimes, even in the tawdry marketplace, you can do good things, even brilliant things (Shakespeare didn't write for *fun*, you know). The parish is Saint Thomas: Aquinas, I thought, when I got my preview tape, especially since the first episode is titled "Proofs for the Existence of God." And, in his sermon at the end, Father Ray even mentions Thomas Aquinas's famous five proofs. But I'm lucky to get to watch this stuff with my wife. "Saint Thomas!" she exclaimed as I reran the show for her. "Of course: the Doubter."

Hello. Series producers David Manson and Richard Kramer may or may not have intended the ambiguity—I think they did—but it's there anyway. The creative and exhausting tension between

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the two Thomases, between anxious skepticism and serene assurance, is right where we all live, unless we've fallen into that narcotic trance Graham Greene disdainfully called "the habit of piety."

Think again about the cast of characters. The older priest of simple faith; the young man with mystical yearnings; the benevolently practical and humanist nonbeliever; the passionately faithful, angry feminist; and the man stretched between belief and rejection. We're—and I don't just mean Catholics—we're each and all of these, depending upon the time of day and the mood. The population of the Saint Thomas parish house, in other words, is a psychic microcosm of the possibilities of belief. This could become a marvelous series, and a very grown-up one.

American TV and American movies have, by and large, done very poorly with religion. We may be, statistically, the most "religious" country in the Western world, but we're oddly more shy about talking about belief than we are talking about sex. We want our clerics to be cute: Bing Crosby crooning through *Going My Way*, or the grand Tom Bosley solving crimes in the silly "Father Dowling Mysteries," or the Episcopalian priest's family in Warner's schlockmeister "Seventh Heaven"—"The Brady Bunch Goes to Vespers." A rabbi? Forget it. And I think we are that way not out of stupidity, but out of an accurate sense that to examine, seriously, the nature of faith is to stare into an abyss that will, sooner or later, stare back into you. But then, on the other hand: of all the adjectives used to describe God, I don't think "nice" has ever appeared.

"Nothing Sacred"—great title, by the way—is not going to change our national diffidence about these things. Hell, it's smart enough, it may not even get renewed at midseason. But it's serious, and it's brave, and miles ahead of the crop of apocalyptic "Millennium" clones that currently infest the Tube. An hour-long dramatic series that actually makes some theological sense? Sink or swim, flush or busted, it's going to be worthwhile to follow the doings of Saint Thomas—the parish, the doubter, and the believer. □

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A Catholic at Harvard

Science, Jews, and Secular Culture
Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century American Intellectual History
David A. Hollinger
Princeton University Press, $27, 289 pp.

Daniel Callahan

When I entered the graduate program in philosophy at Harvard in the fall of 1956, I did not expect to find many Catholics, either on the faculty or among my fellow students. I was right: There were none at all among my teachers and only two or three among the students.

But I was not prepared for the large proportion of Jews in what I thought would be a WASP enclave. Nor was I prepared for the envy I experienced, wishing I had had their background of Jewish intellectual culture, and even more wishing that Catholics would be accepted with the same welcoming embrace they received. That embrace of Catholics was not to be. It soon become evident that the philosophy department, along with much of the rest of the university, was a resolutely secular place, not hospitable to believers of any kind, but particularly not to Catholics. Moreover, as I was gradually to discover, this was true of most of the elite American universities, and surely most of their philosophy departments. Only in history, literature, and the classics could some exceptions to that general rule be found, but not many.

Jews had a distinct advantage in this atmosphere. They benefited from the guilty reaction against the anti-Semitism of the prewar university and the massive murder of European Jews by the Nazis. They also benefited from their enthusiastic embrace of modernism and science, and the eagerness with which they joined liberal and ex-Protestants in working to rid the university and American culture more generally of their historical relationship to Christianity. It was that Christianity, after all, which was responsible for the anti-Semitism that had in great part made it so hard for them to gain a toehold in the universities prior to the war; and it was the pervasive notion that America is a Christian nation that provided the backdrop for that behavior. T.S. Eliot's notorious 1934 statement that, if one wants a Christian society, "any large number of free-thinking Jews is undesirable," was not forgotten either.

The love of science, strong among secular Jews, was a particular help in entering into, and helping to shape, the new secular order. Science was becoming the cultural icon of educated people and the secular university the new church. J. Robert Oppenheimer—surely one of the most prominent Jews and scientists of his era—stressed in his 1953 Reith Lecture in London the ultimate harmony between the interests of science and the interests of humankind: "Our faith—our binding, quiet faith—that knowledge is good and good in itself." In the hands of the sociologist Robert Merton, science was not just the royal road to knowledge, it was also the key to a successful democracy. As for the academy, Walter Lippmann wrote in the *New Republic* in 1966, that "there has fallen to the universities a unique, indispensable, and capital function in the intellectual and spiritual life of modern society." The universities he had in mind were the secular, decidedly non-religious kind that were by then the norm for the best in higher education.

Protestants, particularly of the liberal kind, already had a leg up in this new

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academic world—which they, so to speak, owned anyway—and the secular Jew was a welcome ally. Up at least to the Kennedy years, Catholics just did not count. Even worse, their record during the Spanish Civil War, their embrace of medievalism (as signaled by Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain), and their generally conservative, authoritarian ways hardly commended them to the new times and the new crowd. While the church had long proclaimed the compatibility of religion and science, that stance is far removed from the belief, expressed earlier by Charles Sanders Peirce, that all methods of "fixing belief" other than science will fail. Only true believers of the new kind were wanted, and Catholics were a touch too skeptical, too removed from the requisite idolatry, to qualify.

This whole story (apart from a few Catholic embellishments I add to those he provides) is laid out with commendable clarity and subtlety in David Hollinger's new book. Hollinger, a professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, is one of the nation's most gifted cultural observers, and the story he tells here of the role of Jews in the secularization of the American university has not been well told before. That story helps to explain the Harvard I encountered in the mid-1950s.

About the same time I was reading Hollinger's book I read the Winter 1997 issue of *Daedalus* ($7.95, 351 pp.), devoted to an analysis of the past fifty years of American academic culture, with a special emphasis on philosophy, literary studies, economics, and political science. What the articles in that issue—mainly written by older participants in the fields they are describing—make clear is the remarkable extent to which the trends noted by Hollinger remain potent. Philosophy, economics, and political science are still science-struck, even if there are some significant deviations here and there. Science provides the model of reliable knowledge, and in its communal efforts the model as well for the gaining of knowledge, open yet rigorous, tolerant yet skeptical. While there is a Christian professional society for philosophers, it would be wildly hilarious to suggest that religion has anywhere near the sway and the prestige of science.

Economics, perhaps now the queen of the social sciences because of its status in public policy, remains a tight little ship, taken up with mathematics and modeling, untouched for the most part by the feminism or multiculturalism that have otherwise so infused the university. It is really only in literary studies—and of course in the special feminist and ethnic studies programs—that what many think of as the combined chaos and political correctness of the contemporary university have any serious hold. It is not that way in economics, engineering, policy studies, chemistry, physics, or biology, and not much in philosophy either.

The serious intellectual money in our society goes to the sciences, not literary or feminist or ethnic studies, much less postmodernist musings. The hundreds of millions of dollars each year that the leading universities gain from federal and state research money (but mainly the former) far outpace the pittance that goes to the humanities. The annual budget for the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation is approaching nearly $18 billion a year and rising. The National Endowment for the Humanities gets less than $150 million and its budget is falling. Those figures tell a story not only about pecking orders, but they also show the enormous success of James Conant and others after World War II in radically upgrading the place of science in the university and the larger society. Research science, once the province of well-to-do gentlemen, often using their own money, got hitched to Truth, Democracy, Tolerance, and—Money.

Vice-President Al Gore recently wrote, in the journal *Science*, of the "sacred circle of progress and prosperity." That circle goes unmentioned in Hollinger's book, but is worthy of attention. Science has plenty of cultural clout on its own, but it is the impossibility any longer of separating science and big money that merits attention. They feed upon each other, and they are crucial to the financial well-being of the elite universities, with their heavy dependence upon federal grants. Much else in the university, particularly in literary studies, seems a kind of side show, an entertaining diversion from the serious business of cashing in on empirical reality, a reality never in doubt among scientists.

As even-handed as he is in his historical analysis, Professor Hollinger confesses at the end of his book that: "Science alone is not a sufficient foundation for culture, but were it within my power to design a multiculturalist pentecost, a jubilee morning when the curse of Babel shall be revoked and the dispersed children of Adam and Eve return to Eden to testify with cloven tongues of fire, the language in which they would testify would be the language of Newton and Locke, the language of intersubjective reason, the language of science."

The religious imagery in that passage is obvious. Not so obvious is its connection with Hollinger's expression of puzzlement about American culture. Why, he asks, has it remained so religious, and why has not secularism tri-

"You seem to be a very intelligent young man. Perhaps you could tone it down a little."

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umphed the way it has in much of Europe? He does not pursue those questions, but his book does help to explain why such a gulf has opened up between the university, which has embraced secularism with a passion, and the rest of society.

My own guess is that, save for the Religious Right (and then not all of it), most Americans like it that way. They want to be tough, secular, and scientific in their public lives (which is where money and power lie), and religious in their private lives (where it will give them comfort but not cause them social problems). Thus our legislators, many if not most of them religious, see no conflict at all between putting up huge amounts of money for science, and the implicit secular perspective that lies behind it, while at the same time bemoaning a loss of morality and religious faith in our society. They just don't quite get it.

A final and stray thought occurs to me. One of the very few Catholics to ascend to the top rank of American philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre, has come to fit perfectly into that earlier stereotype of the Catholic thinker: reactionary in his cast of mind, drawn to Aristotle and the medievals for his philosophical heroes, and utterly out of step with his secular, analytic colleagues. Yet this seems to me somehow far more commendable than the model of John F. Kennedy, who purchased pluralistic respectability for Catholics in ways not always savory, just a little too adaptable. Of course it is probably true that MacIntyre would not have made it to the top if he had started his career with his present views. They are no more acceptable in mainstream philosophy today than they were forty years ago. As it turned out, the secular Jews who embraced science came to the academic gaming table with far better cards to play than the religious believer, much less those believers who thought Aquinas had something to say. □

Daniel Callahan *is director of international programs for the Hastings Center and the author, most recently, of* The Troubled Dream of Life: In Search of a Peaceful Death *(Simon & Schuster).*

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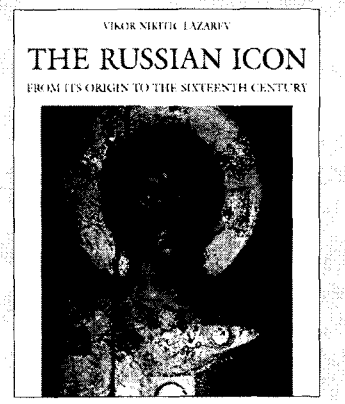

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HEART OF DARKNESS

No Mercy
A Journey to the Heart of the Congo
Redmond O'Hanlon
Knopf, $27.50, 461 pp.

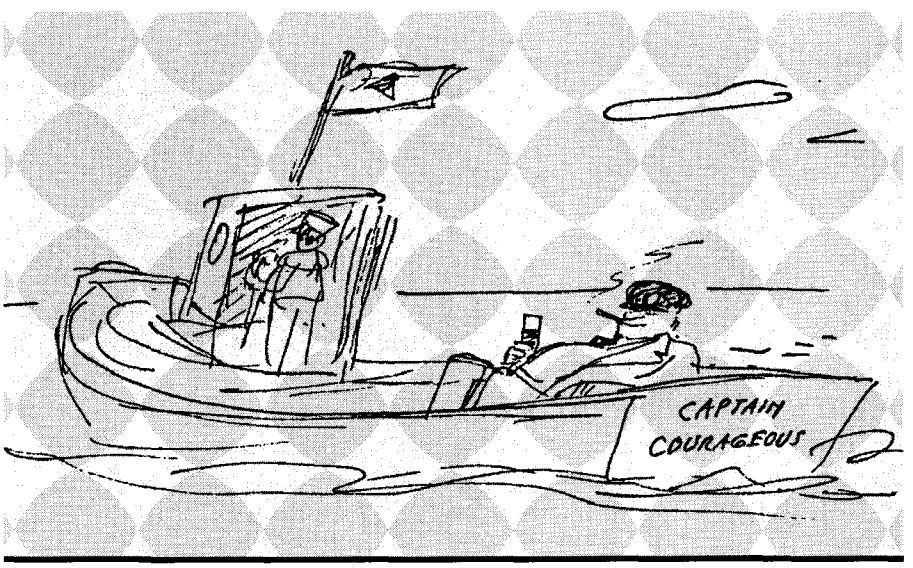
Celia Wren

Stranded in the equatorial African forest, temporarily deserted by his guide, surrounded by hostile villagers who believe him to be a sorcerer, the writer and scholar Redmond O'Hanlon finds himself reading Russian literature aloud to an orphaned baby gorilla. To soothe the peevish animal he begins with a passage from Goncharov's *Oblomov*, describing the "far-off days...when the air, water, forests, and plains were full of marvels," and when "man was not yet able to stand up to the dangers and mysteries of life and nature."

"We still can't, can we?" O'Hanlon manages to remark before the gorilla hurls the novel into the mud. "The more you know, the more frightening death is."

No Mercy: A Journey to the Heart of the Congo, the audacious O'Hanlon's remarkable new travelogue, is a voyage into a world of marvels and of fear. With a group of moody escorts, O'Hanlon boated and hiked into the wilds of the People's Republic of Congo (not to be confused with Congo, the country until recently known as Zaire), bending his keen eye on exotic wildlife and native custom, his destination the legendary Lake Télé, home of Mokélé-mbembé, the Congolese Loch Ness monster.

O'Hanlon's wry and fascinating account of his adventure satisfies on many levels. Most immediately entertaining, perhaps, are the sketches of his eccentric companions, to whose boisterous good-humor and frequent crankiness the journey gives ample scope. Representing the host country's Ministry for Conservation of Flora and Fauna is Marcellin Agnagna, an exuberant biologist whose professional interest in crocodile growth-rates is vastly exceeded by his interest in seducing local women. Other members of the party include Marcellin's two brothers—one equally libidinous, one neurotically shy—and Lary Shaffer, an endearing American scientist permanently aghast at dirt, insects, trigger-happy soldiers, meals of manioc, and other ordeals. As resentments flare and varied sensibilities reveal themselves moment by moment, the portraits of these capricious explorers give the narrative resonance and shape.



While O'Hanlon limns personality with the fine strokes of a novelist, he chronicles birds and beasts as obsessively as any scientist. In the book's meticulous catalogue of Congolese fauna, O'Hanlon's vast zoological knowledge anchors astonishingly vivid descriptions. Detail follows detail, thick and fast:

> A pair of Pigmy geese, smaller than Tufted duck, sat snug on the water in a bed of water-lilies. The white face and throat of the male, the metallic green of his head, shot with violet and blue, the sea-green of his earmuffs, the green of his back, his tawny-and-white flanks, the bright yellow stub of his bill ....camouflaged him so effectively against the green metallic shine of the wet lily-pads, their bright white open flowers, the white light flashing obliquely off the ripples....

The effect of so many specifics is almost hypnotic: Reading such passages, one begins to feel oneself slipping into a different kind of existence.

During his trek, O'Hanlon experiences just this kind of defamiliarization, an impression that intensifies as he encounters traditional African beliefs. Life in the Congo Republic increasingly seems to him to be haunted by irrational fears: faith in vengeful spirits, strange transformations, magical powers, and fetishes. He learns of individuals revered or hated for being sorcerers, and of women killed for giving birth to twins. He even runs across a novel argument against conservation surveys: when endangered animals can change into people and back again, how can one complete an accurate census?

O'Hanlon characterizes this worldview as "magical thinking," and by the time he reaches Lake Télé he has begun to feel himself "infected," as though he has learned to think in "the language of dream." Magical thinking, he concludes, is a way to manage fear. To eclipse the oppressive certainty of pain and death, a person creates "lots of little fears, fears you half-know are not serious, to diffuse the big horror into the landscape."

O'Hanlon's own journey provides

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frequent opportunity to wrestle with the big fear. His knowledge of tropical diseases makes him susceptible to dizzying attacks of hypochondria. And on two occasions—during a bout of malaria and after partaking of some suspect marijuana—he experiences eerie fever dreams, hallucinations that give the story an unnerving twist when he weaves them seamlessly into objective detail.

In a way, *No Mercy* itself operates by the logic of magical thinking, for its moments of existential panic alternate with stretches of mere anxiety and dread, sparked by the arcane political intrigues of rural Communists and village chiefs; by the dangers posed by crocodiles, gorillas, and other animals the explorers most wish to see; and even—rationalism notwithstanding—by rumors of the supernatural, for example, the tales of the sinister spirit Samalé, who slashes his initiates with two of his three claws.

O'Hanlon, whose other exploits have included travels through the Amazon Basin and through headhunter territory in Borneo, comes across as a seeker after fear and hardship, for the sake of getting at the essence of things. Grueling adventures, he suggests, yield more truth than can be found in traditional religions, whether Western or African. "When you get faith," he tells Marcellin, who suspects that O'Hanlon is sneering at African beliefs, "you throw the switches, you blow a gasket, you deliberately go soft in the head." It is to describe monotheistic religions that the phrase "no mercy" finally surfaces, toward the end of the book.

Crammed as it is with detail and subtext, *No Mercy* is not light reading. But it is a profound, ambitious, and challenging work, frequently humorous, and full of thrilling observation. In O'Hanlon's hands, what could be a vehicle for armchair travel becomes a meditation on the nature of human belief. "I've discovered what you're after," a testy Marcellin snaps at the author at one point. "You want to know everything, don't you? All about Africa? The secret of life?" O'Hanlon can only agree. □

Celia Wren *is* Commonweal*'s drama critic.*

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

Ferrari. To those three contributors, special thanks.

LARRY HANSEN
Aloha, Oreg.

Credit where due

No doubt out of editorial necessity, my reference to the source for my criticism of Jay Mandle's recent article [Correspondence, September 12] was omitted from the printed version. The source was William Tabb's article, "Globalization Is *an* Issue, the Power of Capital Is *the* Issue" [*Monthly Review*, June 1997]. I hope you will allow me to acknowledge his work.

DOROTHY RASENBERGER
New York, N.Y.

Who is a person & when?

Sidney Callahan's zeal for the unborn [column, June 20] is admirable; it echoes *Evangelium vitae* (no. 30) almost

(Continued on page 30)

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 29)

verbatim. But her arguments are biologically inaccurate, epistemologically and metaphysically questionable, and theologically bordering on heresy. But her most fatal flaw is her failure to recognize the fundamental distinction between nature and person.

Biologically: The zygote does not get implanted into the placenta but into the uterine wall by means of the placenta, which is the organ the embryo produces for that very purpose.

Epistemologically: The metaphoric expression of our union in the mystical body of Christ stands for a supernatural mystery. To reify it into a space/time reality and from that to draw conclusions about the physical realities of human nature is a logically impermissible jump from one order of existence to another order; about as convincing as to argue from words of the Bible that the sun and stars revolve around the earth.

Theologically: To suggest that every individual human person is not a specific unique creation of God, but that somehow we share in some superhuman collective soul, is so foreign to 2,000 years of Catholic doctrine that Ratzinger would make shorter shrift of it than of the works of Tissa Balasuriya.

But the most fundamental flaw is the failure to distinguish between person and nature. Not every person is human; the angels are persons, and so are the Persons of the Trinity. Nor is everything human a person. The white cells in a nosebleed, the sperm in an ejaculate: They are all human; they are alive, they metabolize, and they have human DNA. Yet they are not persons. According to the scholastic definition (and since Callahan seems to use terms from that school, I feel free to argue in the same terminology), a person is an "individual substance of a rational nature." And because moral obligations exist not *vis-à-vis* natures, but persons, it is germane to ask when a particular entity of human nature becomes a person, a human individual. In turn, according to the same scholastic terminology, the principle of individuation resides not in the nature ("form") of a being, but in its material (*materia quantitate signata*). Hence it is appropriate to search for physical markers of a particular being having become, irrevocably, a unique individual of a particular species.

It is a legitimate question whether the "primitive streak," marking the impossibility of further twinning, is such a marker. While it may mark the latest moment after which the being is unquestionably an individual (that is, a person), there is no guarantee that it could not have already become so, at least in the case of those who do not, in fact, twin.

But neither is syngamy (or fertilization) such an indisputable marker; not biologically, at least. And revelation is silent about the precise moment of the beginning of a person's life, as it is of the end; God seems to leave this to human reason and science. Even *Evangelium vitae* acknowledges this (no. 60).

The prohibition of abortion, then, rests not on some revealed truth about the precise moment of the beginning of a person's life; it rests on principles of probability in moral theology. Just as a hunter is not permitted to shoot a moving object that could be a game animal (but could also be a fellow hunter), we must not, in the absence of a scientifically certain marker, risk killing a human being.

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FROM THE DIARY OF SAINT KEVIN OF GLENDALOUGH

Brian Doyle

March 17, Saint Patrick's Day. Unbe*liev*able event this morning: I take my usual walk out into the woods, find a clearing, kneel down, stretch out my arms in supplication to the Lord, and a *blackbird lands in my left hand and lays a clutch of eggs.* Moral dilemma for me: I detest blackbirds, but am constrained by my vow to love life in all creatures great and small. Have no choice but to remain still with arm outstretched. I write this with my right hand, as night falls.

March 18, Saint Cyril's Day. My arm is *killing* me. The blackbird spent all of today building a nest around the eggs, and now I am holding not only incipient birds but plant stems, grass, leaves, twigs, roots, and mud. There are four eggs. They're bluish-white, speckled and mottled, not unlovely. I can tell them apart by the slightly different pattern of speckles as well as by their arrangement in my hand, nicely reflecting the four holy directions. Believe me, I've had a *lot* of time to look at them. Am so thirsty I can barely spit, and at dusk today I was forced to answer the call of nature. Good thing I am on a slight rise, a kind of mossy hillock in this clearing.

March 19, Saint Joseph's Day. Rain. Got drenched. Always wondered what birds do to protect their eggs in rain. Answer: huddle over eggs and get drenched. Felt friendly toward the bird today. First time; have been feeling murderous. Forgive me, Lord.

March 20, Saint Wulfran's Day. Wulfran famed for virtue in spite of the seductions of the world. Wonder if he had to spend four days on his knees in the mud with a bird in his hand. Feeling murderous again today. Very nearly dropped bird, eggs, and all when seized by sneezing fit. Am starving. Am also wondering where the hell the rest of the monks are. Doesn't anybody miss me? When I get back to the abbey I am going to make the dust fly. "You're our leader, Kevin." "We wouldn't be here without you, Kevin," bah.

March 21, Saint Nicholas of Flue's Day. Nicholas was hermit, too, spent nineteen years without taking food or drink, lived only on the Eucharist. *Tell* me about it.

March 22, Saint Lea's Day. Spent her nights in constant prayer. Ditto. Bird and I spent hours staring at each other today. I love bird. Bright yellow eyes, iridescent blue-black sheen, delicate fingery feet. I *really* love bird. Considered reaching over suddenly and stuffing her whole in my mouth, crunching her little bones, and spitting out only her beak and toenails, but refrained after great struggle. Near thing, though.

March 23, Saint Turibius's Day. "Willingly exposed himself to the steaming climate of Peru," say the chronicles. Hmph. Bird eyeing me suspiciously today.

March 24, Saint Catherine of Sweden. Persuaded her husband to join her in a perpetual vow of chastity, forgoing their lawful marital rights for the love of God. No comment.

March 25, the Annunciation. Hard day. Exhausted, sick, starving, my robe is soiled, my hair is matted, the flies and mosquitoes are biting great chunks from me, my arms and legs are wooden, and I have this itch *right* in the middle of my back. I can't go on. I must go on. What did Mary say after the angel told her the news, though? "Let it be done to me as you say...."

March 26, Saint Margaret. "Possessed of good looks, wit, and merriment," say the chronicles, "and crushed to death under great weight." Story of old Kevin of Glendalough. Snow flurry in the morning. Reached over and cupped right hand over eggs and bird like little roof. Hand looks like weathered leather.

March 27, Saint Rupert, missionary. Eggs stirred today. Flame of hope in me: they'll hatch! Tried desperately to remember what I learned in old Brother Brian's science class. *Turdus merula,* the Irish blackbird, incubation of eggs twelve to fifteen days. Good old Brother Brian. Sorry now that I used to mutter "what *possible* difference could knowing about *Turdus merula* ever make?"

March 28: Saint Guntramnus. They didn't hatch, the bastards. Spent the day staring at the eggs, trying to heat them with my eyes, no luck. Rained all day. Starting to wonder if Brother Brian was off a bit on incubation; my God, what if it's 112 to 115 days?

March 29, Saint Joseph of Arimethea. He had the guts to ask for Christ's body. I vaguely remember my body. Spent the day flying through the woods. I am a hawk now.

March 30, Saint John Climacus. I am an egg. I am the egg man. Once there was a Kevin and then he went to the woods and died and they found him years later his bones in the moss.

March 31, Saint Benjamin, martyr. Eggs hatched! Wet ugly birds struggled out of shell! At noon, I slowly let my hand down and lay the cup of their nest on the moss. Rose creakily to feet. Thought about kneeling to thank Lord for four new *Turduses,* decided to stand and pray with arms rigidly by sides. Did little jig to get blood flowing again, and so invented Irish step-dancing. Blessed the birds, including mother bird, who still eyes me warily. Stumbled home to abbey. Cannot *wait* to have chat with brother monks about such things as general *respect* for saints. Drooled thinking of first meal. Decided against eggs. □

Brian Doyle *is the editor of* Portland *magazine and, with his father, Jim Doyle, co-author of* Two Voices *(Liguori).*

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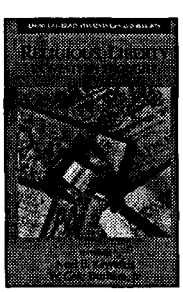

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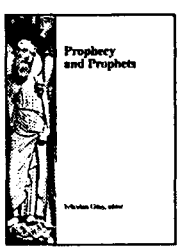

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